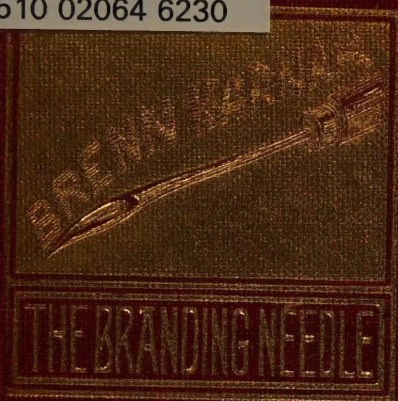




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# THE BRANDING NEEDLE



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THE  
BRANDING NEEDLE  
:: :: OR :: ::  
THE MONASTERY OF CHAROLLES

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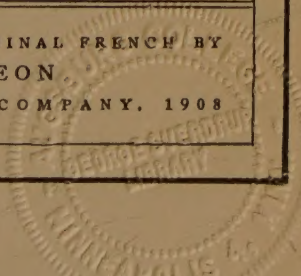
A Tale of the First Communal Charter

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B y E U G E N E S U E

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TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH BY  
DANIEL DE LEON  
NEW YORK LABOR NEWS COMPANY, 1908



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## I N D E X

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

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Semiramis, Brunhild, Catherine of Medicis constitute a trinity of historic women unique in their greatness. Their ambition was boundless, their intellectual powers matchless, the depths of their immorality unfathomable. As such they were the scourges of their respective ages. Queen Brunhild, a central figure in this superb story, may be said to be the Sixth Century heiress of the Semiramis of over ten centuries earlier, and the progenitor of the Catherine of nearly ten centuries later, who figures later in the sixteenth story of this series of Eugene Sue's of historic novels named by him *The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages*.

This story—*The Branding Needle; or The Monastery of Charolles*—is the seventh of the series. Both in the tragic picture of Brunhild, and of the rustic, industrial and peaceful picture of the settlement of Charolles, the story constitutes a connecting link between the turbulence of the previous story—*The Poniard's Hilt; or, Karadeucq and Ronan*—and the renewed turbulence of the age depicted in the story that follows—*The Abbatial Crosier; or, Bonaik and Septimine*.

With much color of truth does Eugene Sue look upon the settlement of Charolles as the remote yet initial step to the Communes which, a few centuries later, constituted a marked feature of the history of France, and ultimately led to historic events of world-wide importance. The circumstances under which the royal charter of Charolles was granted, described with historic accuracy, its perils and its vicissitudes, unfold a page of history of no slight value to the student of history, and of fascinating interest to the lover of historic narratives.

DANIEL DE LEON.

New York, February, 1908.



PART I

THE VALLEY OF CHAROLLES





## CHAPTER I.

### THE SIGNAL.

About fifty years have elapsed since King Clotaire had his son Chram burned alive together with the latter's wife and daughters. Let us forget the spectacle of desolation that conquered Gaul continues to present under the descendants of Clovis for the last fifty years, and rest our eyes upon the Valley of Charolles.

Oh, the fathers of the happy inhabitants who people that corner of the land did not bend their necks under the yoke of either Frankish seigneurs or Gallic bishops. No, no—they proved the old Gallic blood still flowed in their veins. The consequence is noticed in the picture of dignified felicity that the valley offers. Behold on the slope of the hill the cosy homes half shaded by vines, that carpet the walls and the ripe maturity and luxuriant quality of which are attested by their leaves and grapes that the autumn sun has reddened and gilt. Each of the houses is surrounded by a garden of flowers with a clump of shade-giving trees. Never did the eye of man dwell upon a more smiling village. A village? No; it rather resembles a large borough. From at least six to seven hundred houses are scattered on the slope of that hill, without counting the vast thatched structures that are situated below on the meadow, which is watered by a river that rises to the north of the valley, crosses it and forms its boundary far away where the horizon dips. Yonder the river parts in two arms; one flows eastward, the other westward, after bathing in its course the feet of a forest of gigantic chestnut trees from between the tops of which the

roof of a tall stone building is perceived, surmounted by a cross of iron.

No, never yet was promised land better calculated to reward industry with abundance. Half way up the slope of the hill, the purple colored vines; above the vineyards, the agricultural fields, on which the stubble of rye and wheat left from the last harvest is here and there seen burning. The fertile acreage stretches up to the skirts of the forests that crown the surrounding eminences, within which the spacious valley is locked. Below the vineyards are meadowlands watered by the river. Numerous flocks of sheep and herds of horses browse and graze upon the succulent pasture. The bells of the bulls and wethers are heard tinkling their rural melody. Here and yonder carts drawn by oxen slowly roll over the ground where the stubble was burned the day before, or four-wheeled wagons slowly descend the slopes of the vineyards and wend their way towards the common wine-presses, which, together with the stables, the sheep-folds and the pig-sties, all alike common, are located in the neighborhood of the river. Several workshops also lie contiguous to the river; the wash and spinning houses, where the flax is prepared and the wool washed preparatorily to being transformed into warm clothing; there also are situated the tanneries, the forges, the mills equipped with enormous grindstones. Peace, security, contentment and work are seen everywhere reflected in the valley. The sound of the beetles of the washerwomen and the curriers, the clang of the blacksmiths' hammers, the joyful cries of the men and women engaged at the vintage, the rythmic chant of the husbandmen keeping time to the even and slow gait of the draft-oxen, the rustic flute of the shepherds,—all these sounds, including the hum of the swarming bees, another set of indefatigable toilers, who are busily gathering the honey from the last autumnal flowers,—all these different sounds, from the furthest and vaguest to the nearest and loudest, mingle into one

harmony that is at once sweet and imposing; it is the voice of labor and happiness rising heavenward as a continuous thanksgiving.

What is it that is going on in yonder house, which, although constructed like all the others, nevertheless, being nearest to the crest of the hill, seems to be the culminating point of the settlement, and commands a full view of the valley? Dressed in festive garb, the dwellers of that house are seen going in and out. They are seen heaping dry vine twigs in a sort of pyre at a goodly distance from the door. Young girls and children are seen and heard merrily bringing in their arms their contributions of dry wood, and running off again for more combustibles. A short old woman, with hair as white as silver, dainty, comely and still quick despite her advanced age, superintends the preparation of the pyre. As all old women are apt to do, she finds fault and sermonizes—but not in anger, on the contrary. Listen to her:

“Oh, those young girls, those young girls! Always giddy-headed! Work more and laugh less; the pyre is not yet high enough. What does it avail that you rose at early dawn in order to finish your daily tasks before your companions, if you now only frolic instead of hastening the work on the pyre? I am quite sure that more than one impatient look is being cast up here from the valley below, and that more than one voice is saying: ‘What may they be up to on the hill that they do not yet give us the signal? Can they be asleep as in winter?’ I am certain such are the serious suspicions that you are exposing yourselves to, you eternal gigglers! Such are the pranks of your age. I know it, I should not blame you; but remember that the days are short at this season; before our good men shall have had time to lead the cattle back from the fields, stalled the draft oxen and the wagons, and put on their holiday clothes, the sun will be down. We shall not be able to reach the mon-

astery until after dark, and the community expects the signal from us before sunset."

"A few more armfuls of dry wood, dame Odille, and all that will be left to do will be to set it on fire," answered a handsome lassie of sixteen years with blue eyes and black hair; "I shall take charge of lighting the pyre; you will see how bold I can be!"

"Oh, Fulvia, your grandmother, my old friend the Bishopess, is right, indeed, when she says that you are a dare-devil."

"My good grandmother is like yourself, dame Odille; her scoldings are but caresses; she loves all that is young and gay."

"And I presume you act so crazily merely in order to please her?"

"Yes, dame Odille; because you must know that it costs me a good deal, it is awfully hard for me to be gay! Alas! Alas!"

And the lass punctuated each exclamation with such a hearty outburst of laughter and droll action, that the good little old woman could not refrain from following the example. Whereupon she said:

"As true as this is the fiftieth time that we celebrate the anniversary of our settling in the Valley of Charolles, I never saw a girl of a more unalterably happy disposition than yours, my lovely Fulvia."

"Fifty years! How awfully long that is, dame Odille. It seems to me I could never live to see fifty years!"

"It looks that way at your charming age of sixteen; but to me, Fulvia, these fifty years of peace and happiness have sped like a dream—except, of course, the evil year when I saw Ronan's father die, and lost my first-born son."

"Look, dame Odille! There are your consolations, now coming up from the field!"

These "consolations" were her husband Ronan himself and his second son Gregory, a man now of mature age who was, in turn, accompanied by his two children, Guenek, a strapping lad



of twenty, and Asilyk, a handsome girl of eighteen. Despite his white hair and beard, and despite his seventy-five years, Ronan the Vagre was still quick of motion, vigorous and frolicsome as ever.

"Good evening," he called out to his wife as he embraced her; "good evening, little Odille."

And after him it was the turn of Gregory and his children to embrace the dame.

"Good evening, dear mother."

"Good evening, dear grandmother."

"Do you hear them?" put in Ronan's wife with that smile that sits so charming on the lips of happy elderly people. "Do you hear them? To these two I am 'grandmother,' and 'for this one here I am 'Little Odille.'"

"Even when you will be a hundred years old, and you will surely reach that age, by the faith of Ronan! I shall always call you 'Little Odille' just as, my little Odille, I shall always call these two friends who are approaching the 'Master of the Hounds' and the 'Bishopess.'"

Just then the Master of the Hounds and his wife joined the group where Ronan stood; the heads of both the new arrivals had been whitened with age, but their faces beamed with happiness.

"Ho! Ho! How fine you look, my old companion, with your new blouse and embroidered cap! And you, beautiful Bishopess, you are no less gorgeously arrayed!"

"Ronan, by the faith of an old Vagre!" said the Master of the Hounds, "I love my Fulvia, in the matron's dress that she now wears, with her brown robe and her coif as white as her hair, as much as I did when she wore her orange skirt, blue sash, gold necklace and silver embroidered red stockings. Do you remember, Ronan? Do you?"

"Odille, if my husband and yours begin to talk about olden

days, we shall not arrive at the monastery until to-morrow morning. But Loysik is waiting for us. Let us start."

"Beautiful and wise Bishopess, we shall hearken unto you," merrily replied Ronan. "Come, Gregory; come, my children; let us start, that will take us all the quicker to my good brother Loysik."

A minute later, Fulvia, the grandchild of the Bishopess, came out of the house with several of her girl friends, with a lighted brand in her hand, wherewith she set the pyre on fire. The gladsome cries of the girls and children greeted the bright and sparkling column of fire that mounted heavenward. At the signal, the people down in the valley who were still at work in the fields, started homeward, and an hour later they marched in a body, men, women and children, the old and the young, in festive groups to the monastery of Charolles.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE ANNUAL CELEBRATION.

The monastic establishment of Charolles was a large sized and solid stone building, without any ornamentation whatever. Besides the cells of the monks, it contained within its precincts a granary, a chapel, a hospital for the male patients of the valley, and a school for young children. During the fifty years of the existence of the settlement, the monk laborers re-elected Loysik every year their superior, and, a strange thing in these days, they all remained lay, Loysik having ever warned them against rashly binding themselves by eternal vows and confounding themselves with the clergy. The monks of the monastery of Charolles lived under rules which they established for themselves and rigorously observed. The discipline of the Order of St. Benoit, which was adopted by a large number of the monasteries of Gaul, seemed to Loysik, by reason of some of its statutes, to either annihilate or at least, degrade human conscience, reason and dignity. If, for instance, the superior ordered a monk to do a thing that was physically impossible, then the monk, after having humbly informed his chief of the impossibility of what was demanded of him, was in duty bound to bow before the order. Another of the statutes provided literally: "It is not allowed to a monk to have his own body and will under his own command." Worst of all it was formally forbidden a monk "to either defend or protect his fellow monk, even though they be united by the bonds of consanguinity." Such a voluntary renunciation of the tenderest and self-respecting impulses; such an abnegation of conscience and of human reason, carried to the point of imbecility; such passive obedience, which turns man into a soulless machine, a species

of corpse, seemed too absurd to Loysik, and he resisted the invasion of Charolles by the rules of the Order of St. Benoit, however generally accepted they otherwise were in Gaul.

Loysik presided over the labors of the monastery, and himself took part in them until with old age his strength no longer permitted him to do so. He tended the sick, and assisted by several other brothers he taught the children of the inhabitants of the valley. In the evening, after the hard work of the day, he gathered the brothers around him; in summer, under the vault of the gallery that surrounded the inside yard of the cloister; in winter, in the refectory. There, faithful to the traditions of his family, he narrated to his brothers the glories of ancient Gaul, and the deeds of the valiant heroes of olden times, thus keeping alive in the hearts of all the sacred cult of the fatherland, and combating the feeling of discouragement that often seized upon the firmest spirits at the sight of the abject plight in which all the Gallic provinces subject to Frankish rule found themselves.

The community had thus lived peacefully and industriously for many years under the direction of Loysik. Rarely had he occasion to restore harmony among the brothers. Nevertheless, a few ferments of fleeting dissension, speedily, however, allayed by the ascendancy of the aged monk laborer, manifested themselves ever and anon. The following was the source of these untoward events:

Although absolutely free and independent in all that concerned its internal regulations, the election of its superior, the disposition of the yield of the land which it cultivated, nevertheless the monastery of Charolles was subject to the jurisdiction of the diocese of the bishop; moreover, the prelate had the right to place at the monastery the priests of his own choice to read mass, administer communion and the other sacraments, and officiate in the chapel of the monastery which was also the place of religious worship for the other inhabitants of the

Valley of Charolles. Loysik submitted to these requirements which the times imposed, in order to insure the tranquility of his brothers and of the other inhabitants of the Valley. But the priests, who thus entered the bosom of the lay cloister, sought more than once to sow discord among the monk laborers, saying to some that they devoted too little time to prayer, urging others to enter the church and become ecclesiastical monks, and thus share the power of the clergy. More than once did these underhanded manoeuvres reach the ears of Loysik, who would then firmly address these concocters of dissension in these terms:

“Who labors prays. Jesus of Nazareth severely condemns the do-nothings who will not move with one of their fingers the heavy burdens and grievous to be borne which they lay on their brothers’ shoulders and for a pretence make long prayers. We want no idlers here. We are all brothers, and the children of one God. Whether a monk be lay or ecclesiastic they are all alike, provided they live Christian lives. If any there be who, having done his full share in the work of the cloister, chooses to employ in prayer the leisure that man needs after work, he is free to do so—as free as are other members of our community to employ their leisure in the cultivation of flowers, in reading, in conversation with their friends, in fishing, in promenading, in singing, in designing manuscripts, or in any other accomplishment, including the exercise of arms, seeing that we live in days when it is often necessary to repel force with force, and defend one’s own life and the lives of his family against violence. Accordingly, in my eyes, he who, after work, seeks honest recreation, is as worthy as he who employs his leisure in prayer. Only idlers are impious! We despise all those who refuse to work.”

Loysik was so universally venerated and the community was so happy and thriving that the outside priests never succeeded in permanently disturbing its quiet and harmony. Moreover,



Loysik owned both the land and the buildings of the monastery by virtue of an authentic charter issued to him by King Clotaire. Accordingly, the prelates of Chalon found themselves obliged to respect his rights, while they never desisted from pursuing their ends through perfidious means.

On this day the colony and community of Charolles had a holiday. The monk laborers strove to give the best possible reception to their friends of the Valley, who, agreeable to a long established custom, came to thank Loysik for the happy life that they owed him, these descendants of Vagres, brave devils whom the monk's word had converted. Only once a year was the freely adopted rule suspended that interdicted the admittance of women to the cloister. The monks were setting up long tables wherever any could be placed, in the refectory, in the halls where they worked at several manual industries, under the open galleries that ran around the inner courtyard, and even in the yard itself, which, on such solemn and festive occasions, was over-roofed by sheets of linen held fast with cords. In fact, there were tables even in the hall of arms. What! An arsenal in a monastery? Yes. The arms of the Vagres, the founders of the colony and the community, had all been deposited there—a wise measure, advised by Loysik, and which the monk laborers and colonists appreciated at the time when the troops of Chram attacked the Valley. No similar occurrence had happened again since then, but the arsenal was carefully kept and increased. Twice each month, both in the village and the community, the men exercised themselves in the handling of arms, an ever useful precaution in these days, Loysik would say, when one might from one moment to another be called upon to repel some armed band of the Frankish seigneurs.

The monk laborers were engaged setting up tables everywhere. On the tables they placed with innocent pride the fruits of their labors—good wheat bread made of wheat of their own harvesting, generous wine yielded by their own vineyard, quar-

ters of beef and mutton coming from their own cattle yards, fruits and vegetables raised in their own gardens, milk of their own cows, honey from their own hives. They owed this abundance to their daily labor; they now enjoyed its sight and the comfort it afforded both them and their friends. Nothing more legitimate! Besides, the monks experienced profound satisfaction in proving to their old friends of the Valley that they also were good husbandmen, skilful vintners, experienced horticulturists and competent shepherds.

Occasionally it would also befall—the devil ever is at his wicked work—that at some of these anniversary celebrations, when the women and maids were admitted to the otherwise forbidden precincts of the monastery, some monk laborer discovered, by the impression produced upon him by some pretty girl, that his fondness for the austere freedom of celibacy was rather premature. On such occasions the swain would open his heart to Loysik. The latter always insisted upon three months of reflection on the part of the brother, and in the event of his persisting in his conjugal vocation Loysik was speedily seen strolling into the village leaning upon his cane. There he would converse with the parents of the maid upon the advisability of the match; and it rarely happened but that a few months later the colony numbered one more household and the community one brother less, while Loysik would say: “Here is one more evidence of my being right in not accepting eternal vows from my monks.”

The preparations for the reception had long been finished in the interior of the monastery, and the sun was on the point of setting when the laborer monks heard a loud noise outside. The whole colony was arriving. At the head of the crowd marched Ronan and the Master of the Hounds, Odille and the Bishopess. They were the four oldest inhabitants of the Valley. A few old Vagres, but younger than these followed behind them;

then came the children, the grandchildren, the greatgrandchildren of that once so disorderly and so redoubted Vagrery.

Informed of the approach of his friends, Loysik stepped to the gate of the monastery to receive them. Like all the other brothers of the community, the venerable monk was clad in a robe of coarse brown wool, held around his waist by a leather belt. His head was now completely bald; his long snow-white beard fell upon his chest; his bearing was still erect, his eyes clear, although he was beyond eighty; only his venerable hands were slightly agitated by a tremor. The crowd halted; Ronan approached, took his brother's hand, and addressed to him these words:

"Loysik, it is to-day fifty-one years ago that a troop of determined Vagres stood awaiting your arrival on the border of Burgundy. You came to us; you spoke wise words to us; you preached to us the virile virtues of labor and of the domestic hearth; and you thereupon put us in condition to put those virtues into practice by offering to our troop the free enjoyment of this valley. A year later, that is now fifty years ago, our budding colony celebrated the first anniversary of its foundation in this region; and to-day we come—we, our children and the children of our children—once again to say to you through my mouth: 'We are happy, thanks to you, brother; eternal gratitude and friendship to Loysik!'"

"Yes, yes!" echoed the crowd. "Eternal acknowledgment to Loysik—respect and gratitude for our friend, our good father!"

The old monk laborer was deeply moved; sweet tears rolled down from his eyes; he made a sign that he wished to speak; and in the midst of profound silence he uttered these words:

"Thanks to you, my friends, my brothers, to those of you who lived fifty years ago, and to you others who have not known the frightful times that we older ones have experienced, except from the accounts given to you by your parents—thanks for

the joy that you afford me this day. After having made themselves feared by their valor, the founders of this colony have made themselves beloved and respected by approving themselves men and women who loved work, were peaceful and honored the family. A happy accident willed it that, in the very midst of the disasters of civil war that for so many years have been desolating our country, Burgundy should be spared these misfortunes, the fruits of a murderous conquest. Let us bless the name of God, who allows us to live here in peace and freedom. But, alas! everywhere else in Gaul, even in this province, our brothers continue under the yoke of slavery. Never forget that. While awaiting the still distant day of the ultimate enfranchisement of our brothers, your savings, together with the savings of the community, have this year also enabled us to ransom a few slave families. Here they are. Love them as we love one another. They also are children of Gaul, disinherited, as we ourselves were fifty-one years ago."

When Loysik finished saying these words, several families, consisting of men, women, children, together with a few aged couples, issued from the monastery weeping with joy. The colonists were emulous of one another as to which of them should harbor the new arrivals until they could provide for themselves. It required Loysik's intervention, always respected, in order to calm the kind and zealous rivalry of the colonists in the tender of their services. With his wonted wisdom he distributed the new colonists among the older ones.

Every year and shortly before these annual celebrations, Loysik left the colony with a sum more or less large, the fruit of the joint savings of the colonists and the community set aside for the ransom of slaves. A few resolute and well-armed monk laborers would then accompany Loysik to Chalon-on-the-Saone, where, towards the beginning of the autumn, a large market of human Gallic flesh was held under the presidency of the count and the bishop of that city, the capital of Burgundy.

From the market place the splendid palace of Queen Brunhild could be seen. Loysik would buy as many slaves as the money that he carried with him would permit, but always regretting to find that the ecclesiastical slaves were too high for his purse. The bishops always sold them at double the price of any other. Occasionally, thanks to his persuasive eloquence, Loysik would obtain from some Frankish and less barbarous seigneur than his fellows the gift of a few slaves, and thus increased still more the number of his new colonists, who, the moment they touched the soil of the Valley of Charolles, received a hearty welcome, enjoyed the opportunity to work together with the well-being that flows therefrom, and, above all, regained their freedom.

After the newly enfranchised slaves were distributed among the inhabitants of the Valley, monk laborers and colonists, men, women and children went to table. What a banquet!

"Our feasts in Vagrery were nothing compared with this!" exclaimed Ronan. "Not so, Master of the Hounds?"

"Do you remember, among others of our then sumptuous repasts, the famous supper at our lair in the defile of Allange?"

"Where Bishop Cautin officiated as our cook?"

"Odille, do you remember that strange night when I saw you for the first time, on the occasion of the burning down of the villa of my then husband, the bishop?"

"Certainly, Fulvia, I do remember it; and also the open-handedness with which the Vagres distributed the booty among the poor."

"Loysik, it was during that night that I first learned that you and I were brothers."

"Ah, Ronan, how very brave was not our father Karadeucq! What courage did he not display together with our friend the Master of the Hounds in order to liberate us from the ergastula in the burg of Count Neroweg!"

"Do you remember? Do you all remember?"—once that subject was broached, these questions flew inexhaustible from



the lips of the old friends. Thus Ronan, Loysik, the Master of the Hounds, Odille, the Bishopess, all of whom sat together at a table, chatted merrily, while the younger guests enjoyed chattering about the present. The joy was great and general on that evening at the monastery of Charolles.

In the middle of the celebration one of the monk laborers said to a companion:

"What has become of our two priests, Placidus and Feli-bien? Their absence alarms me."

"Those pious men found, perhaps, the feast too profane. They offered the two men on guard at the lodge where the punt lands to take their places this evening, in order that our brothers might assist at the celebration."

"Somehow, I mistrust that breed!"

## CHAPTER III.

### ON THE WATCH AT THE RIVER.

The river that rose in the Valley of Charolles crossed it in its full length, then parted into two arms, and thus served both for boundary and natural defense to the territory of the colony. As a matter of precaution, Loysik ordered a punt that served as the only means of communication with the opposite territory, belonging to the diocese of Chalon, to be beached every evening and tied on the Charolles side of the stream. A little lodge, where two brothers of the community always were on guard, was constructed near the landing place of the punt.

The limpid waters of the stream, which was at its widest at that point, reflected that night the mellow light of the moon at its fullest; the two priests who fraternally offered to take the places of the monks and mount guard in their stead walked uneasily up and down near the lodge.

"Placidus, do you see anything? Do you hear anything?" his companion inquired.

"Nothing. I see and hear nothing."

"And yet the moon is high—it must be nearly midnight—and no one yet."

"Let us not lose hope, Felibien."

"It will be a great misfortune if they break their appointment. It will be long before we have another such opportunity to install ourselves as the watchmen of the punt."

"It is only on such a night that the monastery could be safely attacked."

"And yet no one comes."

"Listen—listen—"

"Do you hear anything?"

"No, I was mistaken—it is the rippling of the water on the pebbles of the river bank."

"Perhaps our bishop renounced his project of attacking the monastery."

"That is not likely, seeing that he obtained the consent of Queen Brunhild."

"Listen—listen—this time I am not mistaken. Look yonder, on the opposite bank—do you notice anything sparkling?"

"It is the reflection of the moon on the armor of the warriors."

"Now they are coming! Do you hear the three bugle blasts?"

"It is the signal agreed upon. Quick, now, quick! Let us unfasten the punt and cross over to the other side."

The ropes were unfastened; pushed by Placidus and Felibien by means of long poles the punt arrived at the opposite bank. Mounted on a mule a man awaited them on the opposite shore. He was a Catholic priest. His face was hard and imperious. At his side was a Frankish chief on horseback and escorted by about a score of riders cased in iron. A wagon filled with baggage, drawn by four oxen and followed by several slaves on foot attended the Frankish chief.

"Reverend archdeacon," said Placidus to the man on horseback and in the black robe, "we began to despair of your arrival; but you are still on time. The whole colony—men, women, girls and children—is assembled at the monastery, and only God knows the abominations that are taking place there under the very eyes of Loysik, who incites these sacrilegious excesses!"

"These scandals are about to come to an end and to receive condign punishment, my sons. Can the horses of these riders and the wagon that carries my baggage be risked in that punt?"

"Reverend archdeacon, the cavalry is too numerous for one trip; we shall have to make three or four passages before they can all be transported to the opposite bank."

"Gondowald," said the archdeacon to the Frankish chief,

"how would it be if we leave your horses and my mule and wagon temporarily on this side of the river? We could march straight upon the monastery with your horsemen following you on foot."

"Whether on foot or on horseback, they will be enough to execute the orders of my glorious mistress, Queen Brunhild, and to dust with the shafts of their lances the backs of those monks of Satan and of that rustic plebs if they dare offer any resistance."

"Reverend archdeacon, we who know what the monks and people of the Valley are capable of, we are of the opinion that, should they rebelliously resist the orders of our holy bishop of Chalon, twenty warriors will not suffice to overpower them."

Gondowald cast a disdainful look at the priest, and did not even consent to make an answer.

"I do not share your fears, my dear sons; and I have good reasons for my opinion," answered the archdeacon haughtily. Here we are all in the punt—push off!"

A short while later the archdeacon, Gondowald the chamberlain of Queen Brunhild, and the Queen's twenty warriors landed on the Valley shore, casqued, cuirassed and armed with lances and swords. From their shoulders hung their gilt and painted bucklers.

"Is the distance long from here to the monastery?" inquired the archdeacon as he set foot on land.

"No, father; it is at the most a half hour's walk if we move briskly."

"Lead the way, my dear sons—we will follow."

"Oh, father, the impious people of this community little dream at this hour that the punishment of heaven is ready to descend upon their heads!"

"Move quickly, my sons—justice will soon be done."

"Hermanfred," said the chief of the warriors turning to one

of the men in his troop, "have you with you the rope and iron manacles?"

"Yes, seigneur Gondowald."

## CHAPTER IV.

### BRUNHILD AND FREDEGONDE.

At the monastery the banquet was in full swing. Convivial cordiality presided over the celebration. At the table where Loysik, Ronan, the Master of the Hounds and their respective families were seated, the conversation continued animated and lively. At this moment the subject was the atrocities that took place in the gloomy palace of Queen Brunhild. The happy inhabitants of the Valley listened to the horrible account with the greedy, uneasy and shuddering curiosity that is often felt at night when, seated by a peaceful hearth, one hears some awe-inspiring history. Happy, humble and unknown, the listeners feel certain they will never find themselves concerned in any adventure of the frightful nature of the one that causes them to shudder; they fear and yet they like to hear the end of the tale.

"In order to unravel the sanguinary tangle, and seeing that Brunhild, the present ruler of Burgundy, is the theme, let us first sum up the facts in a few words. Clotaire died not long after he had his son Chram, together with the latter's wife and daughter, burned alive. That was about fifty-three years ago. Is it not so?" Ronan was saying.

"Yes, father," answered Gregory; "we are now in the year 613."

"Clotaire left four sons—Charibert reigned in Paris, Gon-

tran was King of Orleans and Bourges, Sigebert was King of Austrasia and resided in Metz, and Chilperic was left King of Neustria, occupying the royal residence of Soissons, our conquerors, as you know, having given the names of Neustria and Austrasia to the provinces of the north and the east of Gaul."

"Did you say Chilperic, father?" asked Ronan's son. "Chilperic, the Nero of Gaul, one of whose edicts closed with these words: 'Let whomsoever refuses obedience to this law have his eyes put out!'"

"Yes, we were speaking of him and of his brother Sigebert. Let us leave the other two aside, seeing that both Charibert and Gontran died childless, the former in 566, the latter in 593. Although they both showed themselves worthy descendants of Clovis, they need not now occupy us."

"Father, the account that we wish to hear is that of Brunhild and Fredegonde. These two names seem to be inseparable and are both steeped in blood—"

"I am coming to the history of these two monsters and of their two husbands, Chilperic and Sigebert—the two she-wolves have each her wolf, and, what is still worse for Gaul, her whelps. Although married to Andowere, Chilperic had among his numerous concubines a Frankish female slave, a woman of dazzling beauty, and endowed, it is said, with an irresistible power of seduction. Her name was Fredegonde. He became so fascinated with her that, in order to enjoy the company of the slave with utter freedom, he cast off his wife Andowere, who soon thereupon died, in a convent. But Chilperic presently tired of Fredegonde also, and, anxious to emulate his brother Sigebert, who married a princess of royal blood named Brunhild, the daughter of Athanagild, a King of Germanic stock like the Franks, and whose ancestors conquered Spain as Clovis did Gaul, he asked and obtained the hand of Brunhild's sister, Galeswinthe. It is said that nothing was comparable with the sweetness of the face of this princess, while the goodness of her



heart matched the angelic qualities of her face. When she was about to leave Spain to come to Gaul and marry Chilperic, the unhappy soul had sad presentiments of a speedy death. Nor did her presentiments deceive her. Six years after her marriage she was smothered to death in her bed by her own husband."

"Like Wisigarde, the fourth wife of Neroweg, who was strangled to death by that Frankish count, whose family still lives in Auvergne," remarked Gregory. "The Frankish kings and seigneurs all follow the same custom."

"Poor Galeswinthe! But why did her husband Chilperic indulge such ferocity toward her?"

"For the reason that the passion which once drew him to Fredegonde and which had cooled for a time, resumed the upper hand with him more hotly than before. He put his second wife out of the way in order to marry the concubine. Thus Fredegonde was married to Chilperic after the murder of Galeswinthe, and became one of the queens of Gaul. At times odd contrasts are seen in the same family. Galeswinthe was an angel, her sister Brunhild, married to Sigebert, was an infernal being. Of exceptional beauty, gifted with an iron will, vindictive to the point of ferocity, animated by an insatiable ambition, and endowed with an intelligence of such high grade that it would have equalled genius had she only not applied her extraordinary faculties to the blackest deeds—Brunhild could not choose but create for herself a fame at which the world grows pale. She first set her cap to revenge Galeswinthe, who was strangled to death by Chilperic at the instigation of Fredegonde. A frightful feud broke out, accordingly, between the two women who now were mortal enemies, and each of whom reigned with her husband over a part of Gaul: poison, the assassin's dagger, conflagrations, civil war, wholesale butcheries, conflicts between fathers and sons, brothers and brothers—such were the means that the two furies employed against each other. The people

of Gaul did not, of course, escape the devastating storm. The provinces that were subject to Sigebert and Brunhild were pitilessly ravaged by Chilperic, while the possessions of the latter were in turn laid waste by Sigebert. Thus driven by the fury of their wives, the two brothers fought each other until they were both assassinated."

"Oh, if only Gallic blood did not have to flow in torrents, if only these frightful disasters did not heap fresh ills upon our unhappy country, I would be ready to see in the conflict between those two women, who thus blasted the families that they joined, a positive punishment sent down by heaven," observed Loysik. "But, alas, what ills, what frightful sufferings do not these royal hatreds afflict our own people with!"

"And did the two female monsters ever find ready tools for their vengeance?"

"The murders that they did not themselves commit with the aid of poison, they caused to be committed with the dagger. Fredegonde, whose depravity surpassed Messalina's of old, surrounded herself with young pages; she intoxicated them with unspeakable voluptuousness; she threw their reasoning into disorder by means of philters that she herself concocted; by means of these she rendered them frenetic, and then she would hurl them against the appointed victims. It was by such means that she contrived the assassination of King Sigebert, Brunhild's husband, and that she succeeded in poisoning their son Childbert. It was by such means that she caused a large number of her enemies to be despatched with the dagger and, if the chronicles are to be trusted, her own husband Chilperic was numbered among her victims."

"So, then, that veritable fury spewed out of hell—Fredegonde—spared not even her own husband?"

"Some historians, at least, lay his murder to her door; others charge it to Brunhild. Both theories may be correct; the one Queen, as well as the other, had an interest in putting

Chilperic out of the way—Brunhild in order to avenge her sister Galeswinthe, Fredegonde in order to escape the punishment that she feared for the depravity of her life.”

“And did punishment finally overtake the abominable woman?”

“Queen Fredegonde died peaceably in her bed in the year 597 at the age of fifty-five years. Her funeral was pompously celebrated by the Catholic priests and she was buried in consecrated ground in the basilica of St. Germain-des-Pres at Paris. In the language of the panegyrists of our Kings, ‘Fredegonde reigned long, happy and ably.’ At her death she left her kingdom intact to her son Clotaire the younger.”

A shudder of horror passed over the hearers of this shocking history. The royal abominations stood in such strong contrast to the morals of the inhabitants of the Valley, that these good people imagined they had heard the narrative of some frightful dream, the fabric of the delusion of a fever.

Gregory was the first to break the silence that ensued:

“Accordingly, Clotaire the younger, son of Fredegonde and Chilperic, is the grandson of Clotaire the elder, the slayer of his little nephews, and is greatgrandson to Clovis?”

“Yes—and how worthy of his stock he is proving himself you may judge, my son, by the era of new crimes that follows. His mother Fredegonde bequeathed to him the implacable hatred with which she was herself animated against Brunhild. Accordingly, the mortal duel continued unabated between the latter and the son of her enemy.”

“Alas, fresh disasters will befall Gaul with the renewal of the sanguinary conflict!”

“Oh, indeed frightful disasters—frightful—because the crimes of Fredegonde pale before those of Brunhild, our present Queen, the Queen of the people of Burgundy.”

“Father, can the crimes of Brunhild surpass Fredegonde’s?”

“Ronan,” said Odille carrying both her hands to her tem-

ples. "This mass of murders, all committed in the same family, makes one's head reel with dizziness. One's mind feels overburdened and tires in the effort to follow the bloody thread that alone can lead through the maze of such unnamable crimes. Great God, in what times do we live! What sights may yet be reserved for our children!"

"Unless the demons themselves step next out of hell, little Odille, our children will see nothing that could surpass what is happening now. As I said to you, the crimes of Fredegonde are as naught beside Brunhild's. If you only knew what is going on at this very hour in the magnificent castle of Chalon-on-the-Saone, where the old Queen—the daughter, wife and mother of kings—holds her own greatgrandchildren under her tutelage—but no—I dare not—my lips refuse to narrate the shocking incidents—"

"Ronan is right. Shocking things, that language is unable to render, take place to-day in the castle of Queen Brunhild," replied Loysik with a shudder; but turning to his brother he proceeded to say: "Ronan, out of respect for these young families, out of respect for humanity at large, break off your narrative at where you now are."

"You are right, Loysik; I am bound to stop before the impossibility of narrating the misdeeds of Queen Brunhild, who, nevertheless, is one of God's creatures, and belongs to the human species."

At that moment one of the monk laborers approached Loysik and notified him that someone was knocking at the outer gate of the monastery, and that a voice from without announced a message from the bishop of Chalon and from Queen Brunhild.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ASSAULT.

The name of the female fiend who then ruled Burgundy pronounced at that moment, produced a profound sensation among the assembled colonists. They were amazed, and a vague sense of apprehension ran over the assembly.

"A message from the bishop and the Queen?" repeated Loysik rising and proceeding to the outward gate. "That is strange. The punt is tied every evening on this side of the river, and the watchers have imperative orders not to cross the stream at night. The messenger must have taken a boat at Noisan and rowed up the river."

With these thoughts running in his mind the superior of the community approached the massive gate bolted from within. Several monks bearing torches followed the venerable head of their establishment. Ronan, the Master of the Hounds, and several other colonists also accompanied Loysik. He made a sign. The heavy gate was unbolted and turned upon its hinges. It exposed to view, brightly lighted by the moon, the archdeacon and Gondowald, the Queen's chamberlain. Behind them the armed men stood ranged in single file, casqued, cuirassed, their bucklers on their arms, lances in hand, and swords by their sides.

"There is some treachery in this," said Loysik in a low voice to Ronan; and turning to one of the monks he asked: "Who is keeping watch to-night at the lodge of the punt?"

"The two priests—they volunteered to take the places of the two brothers whose turn it was to mount guard to-night."

"I see it all," replied Loysik with bitterness, and stepping forward he addressed the archdeacon, who had also stepped forward but stopped at the threshold of the gate together with

Gondowald, while their escort of soldiers remained where they were posted.

"Who are you? What do you want?" he demanded.

"My name is Salvien, archdeacon of the church of Chalon and nephew of the venerable Sidoine, bishop of this diocese. I am the bearer of orders from your spiritual chief."

"And I, Gondowald, chamberlain of our glorious Queen Brunhild, am commissioned by her to give the bishop's envoy my own and my men's support."

"Here is a letter for you from my uncle," said the archdeacon handing a parchment to Loysik. "I wish you to inform yourself of its contents."

"My years have made my eyes too weak to read; one of my brothers will read the letter aloud to me."

"The letter may contain secret matters," observed the archdeacon; "I recommend to you that you have it read in a low voice."

"We keep no secrets here from one another—read aloud, brother."

And Loysik passed the missive to one of the members of the community, who proceeded to do as ordered by his superior.

The letter was to the effect that Sidoine, bishop of Chalon, instituted his archdeacon Salvien as abbot of the monastery of Charolles, wishing thereby to put an end to the scandals and enormities that for so many years afflicted Christianity by the example of this community; the same was thenceforth to be rigorously subject to the rules of St. Benoit, as were almost all the other monasteries of Gaul. The lay monks who, by their virtue and humble submission to the orders of their new abbot, should merit the favor, the entirely Christian favor, would be allowed to enter the clergy and become Roman monks. Furthermore, by virtue of the seventh canon of the council of Orleans, held two years previous (in the year 611), and which decreed that "the ownership of the domains, lands, vineyards,



slaves and cattle, that may be donated to a parish, shall be vested in the bishop," all the goods of the monastery and of the colony, which, properly speaking, constitute the parish of Charolles, were thenceforth to be vested in the bishop of Chalon, who commissioned his nephew, archdeacon Salvien, to administer said goods. The prelate closed his missive with an order to his beloved son in Christ, Loysik, to proceed upon the spot to the city of Chalon, and there receive the reproof of his bishop and spiritual father, and humbly undergo the punishment or penance that was to be inflicted upon him. Finally, seeing that it might happen that brother Loysik, listening to some diabolical suggestion, might commit the enormity of contemning the orders of his spiritual father, the noble Gondowald, chamberlain of the glorious Queen Brunhild, was commissioned by the illustrious princess to cause the orders of the bishop of Chalon to be carried out, by force, if need be, through the armed men that he would carry with him.

Hardly had the monk laborer finished reading the missive than Gondowald added with a haughty and threatening air:

"I, the chamberlain of the glorious Queen Brunhild, our very excellent and very redoubtable mistress, am commissioned by her to inform you that if you and yours should have the audacity to disobey the orders of the bishop, as may happen, judging from the insolent murmurs that I have just heard, I shall have you and the most recalcitrant of your fellows tied to the tails of the horses of my riders, and shall thus take you to Chalon, quickening your steps with the shafts of our lances over your backs."

In fact, the reading of the bishop's missive was several times interrupted by the murmurs of the monk laborers and of the colonists, and these murmurs swelled to such proportions that the intervention of Loysik became necessary in order to hear the bishop's letter to the end. But when the Frank Gondowald defiantly uttered his insolent threats, the crowd answered with

an explosion of furious cries intermixed with jeers and sneers.

Ronan, the Master of the Hounds and several other old time Vagres were not among the last to murmur against the usurpatory pretensions of the Bishop of Chalon, who proposed to appropriate to himself the goods of the monk laborers and the colonists, and trample down their every right. Although age had whitened their heads and paled their faces, the Vagres felt their old fighting blood boil in their veins. Ever a man of action, Ronan quickly reverted to his early profession and whispered to the Master of the Hounds:

"Pick out thirty resolute men, take them to the arsenal, arm yourselves and run to the punt so as to cut off the retreat of the Franks. I shall take charge of what is to be done here. By the faith of a Vagre, I feel myself grown younger by fifty years!"

"And I, Ronan, while the insolent missive was being read, and especially when the valet of that infamous Queen dared to threaten us, my hand looked for a sword at my side."

Immediately the two old Vagres started to work among the crowd of colonists and monks; they moved hither and thither, whispering in the ears of the men whom they were choosing, and each of whom vanished successively amidst the increasing uproar, that Loysik's firm and sonorous voice was hardly able to dominate as he answered the archdeacon:

"The Bishop of Chalon has no right to impose upon this community either special rules or an abbot. We elect our chiefs ourselves and of our free will, in the same manner that we adopt such rules as we are willing to follow, provided they be Christian. Such was the former and original law that presided at the foundation of all the cloisters of Gaul. The bishops exercise over us only the spiritual jurisdiction that they exercise upon all other lay members. We are here the masters of our goods and of our persons, by virtue of a charter of the late King Clotaire, which expressly forbids his dukes, counts and bishops

to incommode us. You speak of councils. One can find anything he wants in those councils, good and evil, what is just and what is unjust. My memory has not yet left me. This is what the council of 611 says upon this very subject:

"We have learned that certain bishops wrongfully establish their own relatives or favorites as abbots in monasteries, and procure for them iniquitous advantages, in order to acquire through violence all that can be extracted from the monastery by the agent whom they have placed there.'"

The archdeacon bit his lips, and a volley of hisses drowned his voice as he attempted to make answer.

"That language, the language I have quoted to you as held by that council of 611, is the language of justice," Loysik proceeded to say; "and I recognize in no council, in no prelate, in no King, in no Pope the right to dispossess honorable and industrious people of their goods, their lands and their freedom, all of which they hold by virtue of their natural rights, which are anterior and superior to all authority."

"I say that your monastery is a new Babylon, a modern Gomorrah!" cried the archdeacon. "The Bishop of Chalon was so informed; I wished to convince myself by personal observation. I see women and young girls in this place which should be consecrated to austerity, to prayer and to seclusion. I see all the evidences of an unclean orgy, which was doubtlessly intended to be prolonged until morning—under your own eyes, in this monastery!"

"Enough!" cried Loysik in turn and indignantly. "I, as the head of this community, forbid you to soil the ears of these wives and young girls, who are here assembled with their families in order peacefully to celebrate the anniversary of our settlement upon this free soil!"

"Archdeacon, we have had a surfeit of words," put in Gondowald haughtily. "To what purpose reason with these dogs—have you not my men here, ready to enforce obedience?"

"I wish to make one last effort to open the eyes of these unhappy blind people," answered the archdeacon. "This unworthy Loysik keeps them under his infernal magic. All of you who hear my voice, tremble if you resist the orders of our bishop!"

"Salvien," said Loysik, "these words are idle, your threats will be unavailing before our firm resolution to uphold the justice of our cause. We reject you as abbot of this monastery. These monk laborers and the inhabitants of this colony owe no one an account of their goods. This useless debate is wearisome; let us put an end to it. The door of this monastery is open to those who present themselves as friends, but it closes in the face of those who present themselves as enemies or masters, in the name of iniquitous pretensions. Withdraw from these premises!"

"Be gone, archdeacon of the devil!" yelled several voices. "Try not to disturb our celebration! You might be sorry for it!"

"Rebellion! Threats!" cried the archdeacon, and stepping aside to make room for the Frankish warriors to enter the courtyard, he added: "Gondowald, carry out the Queen's orders!"

"But for your delays, her orders would long ago have been executed! Forward, my soldiers; bind the old monk, and exterminate the plebs if it offers resistance!"

"Forward, my boys! Down with these Franks, and long live old Gaul!"

Whose voice was that? It was the voice of old Ronan, close upon whose heels followed about thirty monk laborers and colonists, all picked men, resolute and strong, and fully armed with lances, axes and swords. These doughty men had noiselessly passed out of the precincts of the monastery through the yard of the stables and rounded the outside buildings till they reached a corner of the wall that surrounded the main building. There they halted, silent and in ambush, until the moment when Gon-

dowald summoned his soldiers. Ronan's men immediately and unexpectedly fell thereupon on the Franks. At the same moment and accompanied by an equally determined, strong and well armed body of men, Gregory was seen issuing from the interior buildings of the monastery, pushed his way through the crowd that now filled the courtyard and advanced in good order upon the enemy. The archdeacon, Gondowald and the twenty soldiers that constituted his escort, found themselves suddenly surrounded by over sixty determined men, in justice to whom be it said all of them were animated with evil intentions towards the Franks. The latter were not long in perceiving the hopelessness of their situation and the feelings entertained towards them. They offered no serious resistance; after a few passes they surrendered. Despite, however, the rapidity with which the manoeuvre was executed, Gondowald, who in his first impulse of surprise and rage had raised his sword over Loysik's head and wounded one of the monks who covered the aged superior with his body—Gondowald, for all that he rejoiced in the office of chamberlain to the glorious Queen Brunhild, was thrown to the ground and soundly drubbed before his disarmed men. Thanks to Loysik's intervention, no blood flowed in the rapid melee other than that of the monk who was slightly wounded by Gondowald. As a matter of precaution, the noble chamberlain was bound fast and handcuffed with the identical rope and manacles that, with a foresight for which old Ronan felt duly grateful, he had intended for Loysik.

"In the name of the Holy Roman and Apostolic Church, I excommunicate you all!" cried the archdeacon livid with rage. "Anathema upon whosoever should dare to lift a sacrilegious hand against a priest of the Church, an anointed of the Lord!"

"Tempt me not, archdeacon of Satan! By the faith of a Vagre, old as I am, I have a good mind to deserve your anathema by letting loose upon your sacred back a shower of blows with the scabbard of my sword."



"Ronan, Ronan, no violence!" said Loysik. "These strangers came here as enemies; they were the first to shed blood; you have disarmed them; that was just—"

"And their arms will enrich our arsenal," Ronan broke in saying. "Come, boys, gather in that goodly harvest of iron. By my faith, we shall now be armed like royal warriors!"

"Take those soldiers and their chief into one of the halls of the monastery," Loysik ordered. "They are to be kept locked up; armed monks shall mount guard at the doors and windows. We shall later decide upon what is to be done."

"To dare hold me a prisoner, me, an officer of Queen Brunhild's household!" cried Gondowald grinding his teeth and struggling to free himself from his bonds. "Oh, you will pay dearly for such audacity, insolent monk! The Queen will take revenge for me upon your old hide!"

"Queen Brunhild has acted in defiance of law and justice by sending hither armed men to support with force the message of the Bishop of Chalon. She did wrong, even if his pretensions were as just as they are iniquitous," Loysik answered Gondowald; and turning to his monks he proceeded: "Take away those men; above all guard against any injury being done to them; if they need food, let them be supplied. Let us prove ourselves merciful."

The monks led away the Frankish soldiers and their chief, the latter of whom had to be carried in their arms, seeing that he wrathfully refused to walk. This being done, Loysik said to the archdeacon, who snarled out of breath with rage like a fox caught in a trap:

"Salvien, before aught else I must insure the safety and tranquility of this colony and community. I am, consequently, compelled to order you to remain a prisoner in this monastery. Fear not; you will be treated with consideration; your prison will be the precinct of the monastery. Within three or four



days at the latest—when I shall be back here—you will be set free to return to Chalon.”

After the archdeacon was removed from their presence, Ronan said to Loysik:

“Brother, you spoke of your return; are you going away? Where to?”

“Yes; I depart this instant. I am going to Chalon, to speak with the bishop and the Queen.”

“What, Loysik!” cried Ronan with painful anxiety. “You leave us? You propose to face Brunhild? Do you forget that that name spells ‘Implacable Vengeance,’ Loysik? You would be running to your perdition! No—no! You shall not undertake such a journey!”

The monk laborers as well as the rest of the colonists shared the apprehensions of Ronan, and began to ply Loysik with tender and pressing entreaties, in order to draw him from his fool-hardy project. The old monk was not to be moved. While one of the brothers who was to accompany him hastily made the preparations for the journey, he repaired to his own cell in order to take the charter of King Clotaire, which he kept there. Ronan and his family followed Loysik, still seeking to dissuade him from his project. He answered them sadly:

“Our situation is beset with perils. Not the fate of the monastery alone but of the whole colony is at stake. You could easily prevail over a handful of soldiers; but we cannot think of resisting Brunhild by force. To attempt any such thing would be to invite the utter ruin of the Valley, the slaughter of its inhabitants and slavery for the survivors. Clotaire’s charter establishes our rights; but what is law or right to Brunhild?”

“But that being so, what do you purpose to do at Chalon, in the very den of the she-wolf?”

“To demand justice of her!”

“But you just said yourself ‘What is law or justice to Brunhild!’”

"She sports with justice as she does with the lives of her men; and yet I entertain some slight hope. I wish you to keep the archdeacon and his soldiers prisoners—first, because in their fury they certainly would have me waylaid and killed on the road; I cling to life in order to lead to a successful issue the business that I now have in hand; secondly, because, rather than have the archdeacon and the chamberlain precede me in making the report of to-night's occurrence, I prefer myself to inform the bishop and Brunhild of the resistance that we offered."

"But, brother, suppose justice is refused you; suppose the implacable Queen orders you to be slain—as she has done with so many other victims of her injustice!"

"In that event the iniquity will be accomplished. In that event, if their purpose is not only to subject your goods and persons to the tyranny and exactions of the Church, but also to despoil you forcibly of the soil and the liberty that you have reconquered and which a royal charter guarantees to you, in that event you will be forced to take a supreme resolution. Call together a solemn council, as our fathers of yore were in the habit of doing whenever the safety of the land was in peril. Let the mothers and wives take part in that council, as was the ancient custom of Gaul, because the fate of their husbands and children is to be determined upon. You will then with calmness, wisdom and firmness decide upon one of these three alternatives—the only ones, alas! left to you: Whether to submit to the pretensions of the Bishop of Chalon, and accept a disguised servitude that will soon transform our free Valley into a domain of the Church, to be exploited for his benefit; whether you will bow before the will of the Queen if she tramples your rights under foot, tears up the charter of Clotaire, and declares our Valley a domain of the royal fisc, which will mean to you spoliation, misery, slavery and shame; or, finally, whether, strong in your own right, but certain of being crushed by superior numbers, to make protest against the royal or episcopal in-

iquity by a heroic defense, and bury yourselves and your families under the ruins of your homes. You will have to decide upon one of these three measures."

"All of us, without exception, men, women and children, will know how to fight and die like our ancestors, Loysik! And perhaps it may happen that the bloody lesson and example may shake the surrounding populations from their torpor. But, brother—brother—to think of your starting alone, and alone confronting a danger that I cannot share with you!"

"Come, Ronan, no weakness. See to it that all the fortified posts of the Valley be occupied as was done fifty years ago at the time of the invasion of Burgundy by Chram. The old military experience that you and the Master of the Hounds have acquired will now be of great service. For the rest, there will be no fear of any attack during the next four or five days. It will take me two days to reach Chalon, and an equally long time for the Queen's troops to reach the Valley, in the event of her resolving upon violence. Until the moment of my arrival at Chalon, both the bishop and Brunhild will be in the dark as to whether their orders were enforced or not. They can receive no tidings seeing that the archdeacon and the chamberlain, together with their troops, remain prisoners in the Valley and under safe surveillance."

"And in case of need they will serve as hostages."

"It is the law of war. If the insane bishop, if the implacable Queen wish war, we must also keep as prisoners the two priests, the infamous hypocrites, who treacherously brought the archdeacon into the Valley."

"I overheard the monks argue upon the lesson that they should administer to the two spies—they spoke of a strapping."

"I expressly forbid any act of violence towards the two priests!" said Loysik in a tone of severe reproof, addressing two monk laborers who happened to be at the time in the cell.

"Those clerks are but the creatures of the bishop; they merely obeyed his orders. I repeat it—no violence, my children!"

"Good father Loysik, seeing you so order it, no harm shall be done them."

Heartrending was the leave-taking between Loysik and both the inhabitants of the colony and the members of the community. Many tears flowed; many childish hands clung to the monk's robe. Vain were the recurring entreaties not to depart on his errand. He took his leave, accompanied as far as the punt by Ronan and his family. At the landing of the punt they found the Master of the Hounds and his posse ready posted to cut off the retreat of the Franks. As he took his post, the Master of the Hounds noticed on the other side of the river a number of slaves guarding the mounts of the warriors and the archdeacon's baggage. The Master of the Hounds considered it prudent to seize both men and animals. Leaving one-half of his companions at the lodge, he crossed the river at the head of the rest. The slaves offered no resistance, and three trips sufficed to transport the men, the animals and the wagons to the opposite shore. Loysik approved the manoeuvre of the Master of the Hounds. Seeing that neither the archdeacon nor Gondowald returned, the slaves might have run back to Chalon and given the alarm. It was important to the project upon which the monk was bent that the recent occurrences at the monastery remained a secret. Considering his advanced age and the long road that he had to travel, Loysik decided to use the archdeacon's mule for the journey. The animal was re-embarked on the punt, which Ronan and his son Gregory decided themselves to take to the other shore, so as to remain a few minutes longer with Loysik. The craft touched ground; the old monk laborer embraced Ronan and his son once more, mounted his mule, and, accompanied by a young brother of the community, who followed him on foot, took the road to Chalon-on-the-Saone, the residence of the redoubted Queen Brunhild.

PART II.

THE CASTLE OF BRUNHILD





## CHAPTER I.

### IN THE TOWER-ROOM.

“Long live he who loves the Franks! May Christ uphold their empire! May He enlighten their chiefs and fill them with grace! May He protect the army, may He fortify the faith, may He grant peace and happiness to those who govern them under the auspices of our Lord Jesus Christ!”

By the faith of a Vagre! That passage from the prelude to the Salic Law always recurs to the mind when Frankish kings or queens are on the tapis. Let us enter the lair of Brunhild—splendid lair! Not rustic is this burg, like Neroweg’s, the large burg that we old Vagres reduced to ashes! No; this great Queen has a refined taste. One of her passions is for architecture. The noble woman loves the ancient arts of Greece and Italy. Aye, she loves art! Regale your sight with the magnificent castle that she built at Chalon-on-the-Saone, the capital of Burgundy. Magnificent as are all her other castles, none, not even that of Bourcheresse, can compare with her royal residence, the superb gardens of which stretch to the very banks of the Saone. It is a palace at once gorgeous and martial. In these days of incessant feuds, kings and seigneurs always turn their homes into fortifications. So also did Brunhild. Her palace is girt by thick walls, flanked with massive towers. One only entrance—a vaulted passage closed at its two extremities by enormous iron-barred doors—leads within. Night and day Brunhild’s men-at-arms mount guard in the vault. In the inside courtyards are numerous other lodges for horsemen and footmen. The halls of the palace are vast; they are paved in marble or in mosaics, and are ornamented with colonnades of jas-

per, porphyry and alabaster surmounted with capitals of gilded bronze. These architectural wonders, masterpieces of art, the spoils of the temples and palaces of Gaul, were transported with the help of an immense number of relays of slaves and beasts of burden from their original and distant sites to the palace of the Queen. These vast and gorgeous halls, which are furthermore stored with massive ivory, gold and silver furniture, with exquisitely wrought pagan statues, with precious vases and tripods, are but vestibules to the private chamber of Brunhild. The sun has just risen. The spacious halls are filling with the Queen's domestic slaves, with officers of her troops, with high dignitaries of her establishment—chamberlains, equerries, stewards, constables—all coming to receive their mistress's orders.

A circular apartment, contrived into one of the towers of the palace, connects with the chamber that the Queen habitually inhabits. The walls are pierced by three doors—one leads to the hall where the officers of the palace are in waiting; another into Brunhild's bedroom; the third, a simple bay closed by a curtain of gilded leather, opens upon a spiral staircase that is built into the hollow of the wall itself. The Queen's chamber is sumptuously furnished. Upon a table, covered with a richly embroidered tapestry, lie rolls of white parchment beside a solid coffer studded with precious stones. Around the table a number of chairs are arranged, all of which are furnished with soft purple cushions. Here and there the shafts of pillars serve as pedestals for vases of jasper, of onyx, or of Corinthian bronze, a material more precious than gold or red alabaster. Upon an antique green plinth rests a group exquisitely wrought in Parisian marble and representing the pagan god of Love caressing Venus. Not far from that group, two statues of bronze that age has turned green represent the obscene figures of a fawn and a nymph. Between these two masterpieces of pagan art, a picture painted upon wood and brought at great expense from Byzantium, represents the infant Christ and John the Baptist, the

latter also as a child. This picture of holiness indicates that Queen Brunhild is a fervent Catholic. Does she not carry on a regular correspondence with the Pope of Rome, the pious Gregory, who can not bestow too many blessings upon his holy daughter in Christ? Further away, upon yonder ivory stand, is an elaborately carved case in which large Roman and Gallic medals of silver and gold are displayed. Among these medals is one of bronze, the only one of that metal in the collection. What does it represent?

What! Here! In a place like this! That august, that venerated face! O, profanation!

Oh, never was the place or time more opportune for a miracle than here and now, in order to terrify evildoers! That bronze effigy should shudder with horror at the place in which it finds itself.

An elderly and richly clad woman, of stony, cynic and wily countenance, steps from Brunhild's bedroom and enters the apartment in the tower. The woman, of noble Frankish extraction and Chrotechilde by name, has long been the confidante in all the Queen's crimes and debaucheries. She steps to a bell, rings it and waits. Shortly after, another old woman appears at the door that opens upon the spiral staircase in the wall. Her extremely simple costume announces that she is of inferior rank.

"I heard you ring, noble dame Chrotechilde, at your orders."

"Did Samuel, the slave merchant, come as ordered?"

"He has been waiting below for over an hour with two young girls, and also an old man with a long white beard."

"Who is that old man?"

"A slave, I suppose, that the Jew is to take somewhere else, after his business is done here."

"Order Samuel to bring up the two young girls, immediately."

The old woman bowed and vanished behind the curtain. Al-

most at the same moment Brunhild stepped out of her bedroom.

The Queen was sixty-seven years of age; the lines on her face still preserved the traces of exceptional beauty. Her wan and wrinkled face was illumined by the somber brilliancy of her two large but sunken eyes, which were surrounded with deep, dark circles. They were black, like her long eyelashes; only her hair was white. A front of brass, cruel lips, penetrating eyes, a head haughtily poised, proud and lofty carriage, seeing that she had preserved a straight and supple waist—such was Brunhild. She had hardly stepped into the apartment, when she stopped, listened and said to Chrotechilde:

“Who is coming up the little stairs?”

“The slave merchant; he has two young girls with him.”

“Let him in—let him in!”

“Madam, whom do you intend to present with the two slave girls that he brings?”

“I shall tell you later. But I am in a hurry to examine the two creatures. The choice is important.”

“Madam, here is Samuel.”

The dealer in Gallic flesh, a Jew by extraction like most of the men who devoted themselves to such traffic, entered, followed by the two slaves whom he brought with him. They were wrapped in long white veils, that were transparent enough to enable them to walk unassisted.

“Illustrious Queen,” said the Jew dropping on one knee and bowing so low that his forehead almost touched the floor, “I am here obedient to your orders; here are two young female slaves; they are veritable treasures of beauty, of sweetness, of gracefulness, of gentleness and above all of maidenliness. Your excellency knows that old Samuel has but one quality—that of being an honest trader.”

“Rise—rise!” commanded Brunhild, addressing the two girls, who, at the sight of the redoubted Queen, had fallen on

their knees at the threshold of the door near the merchant. "Let the girls rise, and remove their veils."

The two slaves hastened to obey the Queen. They rose. To the end of enhancing the value of his merchandise, the Jew had clad the two young girls in short-sleeved tunics, the skirt of which hardly reached their knees, while the cut of their corsage left their bosoms and shoulders half exposed. One of the two slaves, a tall and lithesome girl, wore a white tunic; her eyes were blue; a strand of corals wound itself in the braids of her black hair; eighteen or twenty years was the utmost age that she could be taken for. The girl's face, touchingly beautiful and open, was bathed in tears. Steeped in sorrow and shame, and trembling at every limb, she dared not raise her tear-dimmed eyes out of fear to encounter Brunhild's. After long and attentively contemplating the girl, whom she ordered to turn around in order to have a view of her from all sides, the old Queen exchanged a look of approval with Chrotechilde, who had been no less attentively examining the slave. Addressing the latter she asked:

"Of what country are you?"

"I am from the city of Toul," answered the girl in a tremulous voice.

"Aurelie! Aurelie!" cried Samuel stamping on the ground with his foot. "Is that the way you remember my lessons? You should answer: 'Glorious Queen, I am from the city of Toul.'" And turning towards Brunhild, "Kindly pardon her, madam, but she is so childish, so simple—"

Brunhild cut off the Jew's flow of words and proceeded with her interrogatory:

"Where were you taken?"

"At Toul, madam, when the city was sacked by the King of Burgundy."

"Were you free or slave?"

"I was free—my father was a master armorer."

"Can you read and write? Have you pleasing accomplishments? Can you sing and play?"

"I can read and write, and my mother taught me to play upon the archlute and to sing."

When she said that she could sing, the unhappy girl was unable to repress the sobs that suffocated her. She must have thought of her mother.

"Weep, and weep again!" Samuel cried, angrily scolding the girl. "You can do that better than anything else. But, as you know, great Queen, one has a certain supply of tears, after the supply has run out the bag is empty."

"Do you really believe so, Jew? Fortunately you are merely slandering the human race," observed the Queen with a cruel smile, and proceeded to interrogate the young girl:

"Have you ever been a slave before now?"

"By the faith of Samuel, illustrious Queen, she is as new to slavery as a child in the womb of its mother!" cried the Jew as he saw the young Gallic slave breaking out anew into sobs, and unable to make answer. "I bought Aurelie on the very day of the battle of Toul, and since then my wife Rebecca and I have watched over the girl as if she were our own child, hoping that we might realize a fair price for her. We guarantee that she is a maiden."

After another look over the girl, who now hid her face in her hands, Brunhild said to Samuel:

"Return her veil to her; let her stop whimpering; bring forth the other one."

Aurelie received her veil from the hands of the Jew like an act of kindness, and hastened to wrap herself up in its folds in order to conceal her grief, her shame and her tears. At the Queen's order, the other slave hastened to step forward. Dainty and fresh as a Hebe, she might be sixteen years of age. A string of pearls wound itself in the stout braids of her bright blonde hair; her large hazel eyes sparkled with mischief and fire; her



thin and slightly upturned nose, her rosy and palpitating nostrils, her ruby but rather fleshy lips, her little enamel teeth, her dimpled cheeks and chin, imparted to this girl the liveliest, gayest and most impudent look imaginable. Her tunic of green silk added luster to the whiteness of her bosom and shoulders. Oh! the Jew had no need of telling this one to turn around, and turn again, in order that the aged Queen might obtain a good view of her charming shape. She raised her head, arched her neck, rose on the tips of her feet, folded her arms gracefully, and at all points played the coquette before Brunhild and Chrodechilde, who again exchanged looks of approval, while the Jew, who was now made to feel as uneasy by the audacity of this slave as before by the sorrowful deportment of the other, whispered to her:

“Keep quiet, Blandine—do not shake your legs and wave your arms quite so much. A little more decorum, my girl, in the presence of our illustrious and beloved Queen! One would think you had quicksilver in your veins! May your excellence excuse her, illustrious princess. She is so young, so gay, so giddy-headed—all she wants is to fly from her cage and display her plumage and voice. Lower your eyes, Blandine! You audacious girl! How dare you look our august Queen in the face!”

Indeed, instead of avoiding the penetrating eyes of Brunhild, Blandine sought to catch and mischievously to challenge them, all the while smiling with a confident mien. The Queen, accordingly, after an equally long and minute survey, said to her:

“Slavery does not seem to sadden you?”

“On the contrary, glorious Queen, to me slavery has been freedom.”

“How is that, impudent lass?”

“I had a peevish, cross, quarrelsome step-mother. She made me spend upon the cold stone porches of the basilicas all the time that I was not engaged plying my needle. The old fury used to

beat me whenever I unfortunately took my nose off my sewing and smiled at some lad at the window. Accordingly, great Queen, what a sad lot was mine! Ill fed, I who am so fond of dainties; ill clad, I who am so coquettish; on my feet at the first crow of the cock, I who am so fond of snoozing in my bed! And so it happens that great was my joy when your invincible grandson and his brave army, Queen, illustrious Queen, drew, last year, near Tolbiac, where I lived."

"Why so?"

"Because, glorious Queen, I knew that Frankish warriors never kill young girls. I said to myself: 'Perhaps I may be captured by some baron of Burgundy, a count, or perhaps even a duke, and once I am a slave, if I know myself, I shall become a mistress—because there have been female slaves known—'

"To become Queens, like Fredegonde, not so, my little one?"

"And why not, if they are pretty!" impudently answered the minx without lowering her eyes before Brunhild, who listened to and contemplated her with a pensive air. "But, alas," Blandine proceeded saying with a half suppressed sigh, "I did not then have the fortune of falling into the hands of a seigneur. An old leude, with long white moustaches and not a bit amorous, had me for his share of the booty, and he immediately after sold me to seigneur Samuel. But perhaps it is not yet too late, and a lucky chance may come my way. But what is this that I am saying!" added Blandine smiling her sweetest at Brunhild, "is it not a great, an unexpected piece of good luck that has brought me to your presence, illustrious Queen?"

After a moment's reflection, Brunhild said to the merchant:

"Jew, I shall buy one of these two slaves from you."

"Illustrious Queen, which of the two do you prefer, Aurelie or Blandine?"

"I am not yet decided—leave them at the palace until this evening—they shall be taken to my women's apartment."

At a nod from the Queen, Chrotechilde rang the bell; the

second old woman again appeared; Brunhild's confidante said to her:

"Take these two slaves with you."

"Illustrious Queen," said Blandine turning once more to Brunhild, while the Jew was carefully wrapping the devilish girl in her veil. "Queen, choose me, glorious Queen—you will thereby do a good work—I would so much like to stay at court."

"Keep still, impudent thing!" said Samuel in a low voice while gently pushing Blandine towards the Queen's bedroom, at the door of which Chrotechilde pointed her finger. "Too much is too much; such familiarities may displease our illustrious sovereign!"

The two young girls, one of whom was brimming over with happiness while the other staggered under the weight of her grief, stepped into the Queen's apartment. The Jew humbly bowed before Brunhild, left by the same door that he had entered, and closed behind him the leather curtain that masked the issue to the spiral staircase.

Brunhild and her confidante were left alone.

## CHAPTER II.

### QUEEN AND CONFIDANTE.

"Madam," said Chrotechilde to Brunhild, "for whom do you intend the one of the two female slaves whom you expect to buy?"

"You really ask me?"

"Yes, madam—"

"Chrotechilde, age seems to dull your powers of penetration—perhaps I may have to look for some other confidante."

"Madam, please explain yourself—"

"I mean to test how far the present dullness that seems to have come over you may go."

"Truly, madam, I am at a loss to understand you—"

"Tell me, Chrotechilde, did not my son Childeburt, when he died assassinated by Fredegonde, leave me the guardianship of his two sons, my grandchildren, Thierry and Theudebert?"

"Yes—madam—but I was speaking of the two female slaves—and not of your children."

"At what age was my grandson Theudebert a father?"

"At thirteen—at that age he had a son from Bilichilde, the dark-complexioned slave with green eyes, for whom you paid a big price. I still see her wild looks, as uncommon as her style of beauty. For the rest, she had a nymph's waist, and wavy and jet-black hair that reached the floor. I never in my life saw such hair. But why do you look so somber?"

"The vile slave! Did not that miserable Bilichilde gain a fatal ascendancy over my grandson Theudebert, despite the many other concubines that we furnished him?"

"Indeed, madam! So fatal was the ascendancy that she

gained over him, that she caused us to be driven out of Metz, both you and me, and led prisoners as far as Arcis-on-the-Aube, the boundary of Burgundy, the kingdom of your other grandson, Thierry. But all that is an old story, madam, that is dead and should be forgotten, together with the principal actors in it. Bilichilde is no more; she was last year strangled to death by your grandson, the savage idiot Theudebert himself, who passed from love to hatred; afterwards, beaten at the battle of Tolbiac by his brother, whom you hurled at his head, he was himself shorn of his hair and stabbed to death; finally, his five-year-old son had his skull broken against a stone. Accordingly, that score was thoroughly settled. Were you not amply revenged?"

"No; with me, hatred survives vengeance, it survives death itself, as the dagger survives the murder. No; my vengeance is not yet complete."

"You are not reasonable. To hate beyond the grave is childish at your age."

"And is your mind not yet enlightened by what we have just said?"

"With regard to the two handsome slaves?"

"Yes, with regard to the two pretty girls."

"No, madam, I cannot yet fathom your thoughts."

"Let us, then, proceed, seeing that you have become so obtuse. Tell me, what was the nature of Theudebert, before we gave him Bilichilde for companion?"

"Violent, active, resolute, head-strong and above all proud. At eleven years he already felt the proud ardor of his royal blood. He used to say loftily: 'I am the King of Austrasia! I am master!'"

"And two years after he possessed the dark-complexioned slave with the green eyes and curly hair, whom you so judiciously chose for him, what was then the nature of my grandson? Answer me, Chrotechilde."

"Oh, madam, Theudebert was unrecognizable. Unnerved,

irresolute and languid, he had no will except to go from his bed to table, and from table to bed with his concubines. He hardly had enough spirit to hunt with falcons, a woman's amusement; the hunt of wild animals he could not think of, it was too tiring. I was not at all surprised at the change. From being robust, pert and loving noisy games since his early childhood, he became sickly, weak, puny, dreamy, and preferred darkened rooms as if the light of the sun hurt his eyes. In short, he had given promise of becoming a man of large size, but he died stunted and almost beardless."

"It was that I aimed at, Chrotechilde. Precocious debauchery unnerves the soul as much as it does the body. Accordingly Theudebert's issue was not born with vitality enough to survive."

"True enough; I never saw such puny children—but what else could be expected from a dwarfish and almost imbecile father?"

"And yet, as early as his twelfth year, Theudebert used to say haughtily: 'I am the King of Austrasia! I am master!'"

"Yes, but afterwards, whenever you sought to converse with him upon matters of state, and you called his attention to his being King, the boy would regularly answer you in his languid voice and with his eyes half shut: 'Grandmother, I am King of my women, of my amphoras of old wine and of my falcons! Reign in my stead, grandmother; reign in my name, if you please!'"

"And it did please me, Chrotechilde. I reigned in Austrasia for my grandson Theudebert until the day when that vile slave Bilichilde, availing herself of her influence over the imbecile King, drove me from Metz—drove out me—Brunhild!"

"Ever the remembrance of that occurrence! Again does the storm gather over your forehead! Again your eyes shoot lightning! But, by the heavens, madam; the slave has been strangled, the imbecile and his son are both dead—they have



both been killed and lie in their graves. I even forgot that, in order to complete the hecatomb of those malefic animals, Quintio, the steward of the palace and Duke of Champagne, who took an improper part in the affair of Metz, was put to death upon your orders. What more can you wish? Besides, in exchange for the Austrasia that you lost, did you not gain a Burgundy? If Theudebert drove you from Metz, did you not take refuge here, in Chalon, near your other grandson Thierry? Enervated and besotted through overindulgence with the women that we furnished him with, did you not drive him to undertake a merciless war against his own brother, whom he overcame at Toul and Tolbiac, and who, after these defeats, was himself, together with his son put to death, as I reminded you a minute ago? Thus revenged for being exiled from Metz, have you not ever since held sway over Thierry and actually reigned in his stead? When Aegila, the steward of the palace, made you apprehensive by reason of his growing influence over your grandson, you promptly rid yourself of Aegila, and you substituted him with your lover Protade, who thereupon became the mayor of the palace—”

“But they killed him, Chrotechilde—they killed him—they killed my lover, my Protade!”

“Come, madam; we are here among ourselves; admit that a Queen never suffers any dearth of lovers. You need only choose among the handsomest, the youngest, the most appetizing nobles of the court. Moreover, madam, without meaning to make you any reproaches on that score, if they did kill your Protade, did you not in turn kill their Bishop Didier?”

“Perchance he did not merit his fate?”

“Never was punishment more condign! The wily prelate! He schemed to supplant us in our amorous manoeuvres! Why, the fellow plotted the marriage of your grandson to the Spanish princess, in order to snatch him from the voluptuous life in which we kept him, and thereby withdraw him from your dom-

ination! And what happened to the tonsured schemer? The current of the Chalaronne washed his corpse down the stream, while the Spanish woman, upon whom he reckoned in order to evict you and, by means of her, to rule Thierry and through Thierry Burgundy, that Spanish woman has been repudiated by your grandson, she went back to her own country only six months after her wedding, and we have appropriated her dower. Finally, Thierry died this year of a dysentery," added the hag with a horrid smile, "and so you now are absolute mistress and sovereign Queen of this country of Burgundy, seeing that Sigebert, the eldest son of Thierry, your great-grandson, is now only eleven years old. We must prevent these kinglets from dying out, else Fredegonde's surviving son would fall heir to their kingdoms. All that is needed is that they vegetate, in order that you may reign in their stead. Well, madam, they vegetate. But all this takes us far away from the young female slave whom you wish to buy from Samuel."

"On the contrary, Chrotechilde, the review leads us directly to the slave."

"In what manner?"

"There can no longer be any doubt about it; age is softening your brains; formerly so quick to grasp my purposes, it is now fully a quarter of an hour that you have been giving me distressful proofs of your waning intellect."

"I, madam?"

"Yes, in former days, instead of asking me what I intended doing with one of Samuel's slaves, you would have guessed on the spot. I have been able to convince myself at leisure of the senility of your understanding—it is sad, Chrotechilde."

"As sad to me as to you, madam. But deign to explain yourself, I pray you. For me to hear is to obey."

"What! Dullard! You know that I have the guardianship of my great-grandchildren, and yet you stupidly ask me what

I propose to do with one of the two pretty slaves! Do you now understand?"

"Oh! Yes! I now begin to understand, madam; but yet your reproaches were unmerited. You forget that Sigebert is not yet eleven."

"All the better! The debauch will begin so much earlier."

"That is true," remarked the other monster with a horrid peal of laughter. "That is true; all the better. The debauch will start so much sooner."

During this shocking conversation the august bronze effigy remained motionless in the case of medals on the ivory stand; it never once as much as winked, nor did its metal mouth utter a cry of malediction to shake the walls of the apartment like a trumpet blast of the day of judgment.

The conversation between the two matrons proceeded.

"You mean to furnish a concubine to your great-grandson, Sigebert," said Chrotechilde to the Queen, "although he is not yet eleven."

"Yes," repeated Brunhild; "but what happened with Bili-childe makes me pause: I do not know which of the two slaves to take. What is your opinion, in view of your experience?"

"The tall brunette who weeps constantly will never be dangerous; she is mild, candid, and stupid as a sheep. There is no fear that the silly thing will ever instil Sigebert with evil thoughts against you."

"I also am strongly inclined in favor of the weepful one; the other girl seems to me rather too bold a piece. The impudent thing never once lowered her eyes before mine, that terrify the otherwise firmest and most daring men."

"It is quite possible, madam, that the frisky little imp may have too large a measure of what the tall one has too little—there may be profit in that. Let us look at things as they are. Sigebert is not yet eleven, he is very childish, thinks only of his top and huckle-bones; besides, he is quiet and timid, a verit-

able lamb. Now, then, if the tall silly thing associates with him like a sheep—you understand me, madam? On the other hand, the little gay imp might set our lamb afire. I always remember the fear of Theudebert at the sight of the girl with the green eyes and curly hair. The matter requires careful consideration, madam. Let us first study the nature of the two girls. Moreover, there is no great hurry in the matter. Sigebert is now in Germany with Duke Warnachaire, the mayor of the palace of Burgundy.”

“They may be back any moment. I should not be surprised to see them back to-day. Moreover, I am in all the greater hurry to procure a slave girl for Sigebert, seeing that I fear Warnachaire may have gained some influence over him during this journey into Germany. If so, whatever influence Warnachaire may have gained over the boy will be speedily lost in his experiences with love.”

“But, madam, if you mistrust the duke, why did you confide Sigebert to him?”

“Was it not absolutely necessary for Sigebert to be a part of the embassy? The sight of the royal child, with his sweet face, was certain to interest in his behalf the German tribes on the other side of the Rhine whose alliance Warnachaire was to secure for me. Their troops will double my army. Oh, in this last supreme effort, in this merciless war that will now break out between me and Clotaire II, this son of Fredegonde will be ground to dust—it must be—it must be—my vengeance must be complete.”

“And it will be, madam. Until now, your enemies have all fallen under your blows. The death of Fredegonde’s son will crown the work. I must, nevertheless, admit that this Duke Warnachaire makes me feel uneasy. Madam, these mayors of the palaces, who, forty-five or fifty years ago, under the reign of the sons of old Clotaire, began with being the intendants of the royal palaces, and who, ever since, have by little and little

become the actual governors of the people, I fear me that these mayors of the palaces will end by swallowing up the kings, if the kings do not suppress them. These able folks say to the princes: 'Keep concubines, drink, play, hunt, sleep, squander the money that we fill your treasuries with, enjoy your lives, bother not with matters of government, we shall take charge of that burden.' These are dangerous and wicked proceedings, madam. That a mother, a grandmother should act in that manner towards her sons and grandsons, that is allowable; but with mayors of the palace it becomes usurpation; and this Warnachaire, whom you allowed to retain his office of mayor after Thierry's death is bent, it seems to me, upon dominating Sigebert and ousting you, madam. I know that with the tall or the short slave we shall be able to hold our own against the duke—but never forget your exile from Metz, madam!"

"You are preaching to one already converted. I recently wrote to Aimoin, who returns with Warnachaire, to kill him on the way back."

"Oh, glorious Queen, why did you not say so before! I would have spared you my rhetoric."

"But unfortunately Aimoin failed to carry out my orders. Warnachaire is still alive."

"Why did he not obey?"

"I do not yet know; I may learn the reason to-day."

"At any rate we should not be hasty in thinking ill of Aimoin. Perhaps no favorable opportunity presented itself; who knows but you may yet see him return alone with Sigebert. And if not, once Warnachaire is back at Chalon, in this castle, his fate, madam, will be in the hollow of your hand—and you should not hesitate to strike. Oh, these mayors of the palaces, these mayors of the palaces! I look upon them as the gravest danger to the royal family. You may be certain, madam, that the royal family will never enjoy safety until it will have rid itself of these daily more dangerous rivals."



"We need time to overthrow their power. They have drawn around them all the beneficiary seigneurs whom the royal generosity enriched. Oh! Time! Time! Oh, how short is life. I need time; combined with it, will-power and force can do all. The time that I need is a long reign; I shall have it. The barbarian tribes on the other side of the Rhine have responded to our call; they will join our army. Thanks to their reinforcements, the troops of Clotaire will be crushed, and the son of Fredegonde will fall into my power! Oh! To inflict upon the son a slow death under the protracted tortures that I prepared for his mother! To avenge by his agony the murder of my sister Galeswinthe, and of my husband Sigebert! To take possession of Clotaire's kingdom and reign alone, the undisputed mistress of all Gaul for many a long year! That is my aim. And it will be reached. I feel myself full of life, strength and will-power!"

"You will live a hundred years and more."

"I believe it. I feel it. Aye, I feel within me indomitable will and vitality. To reign! the ambition of great souls! To reign like the Emperors of Rome! I wish to emulate them in all their sovereign omnipotence! I wish to count by the millions the instruments of my will! I wish, by a mere gesture, to cause the power of my arms to be felt from one confine of the world to the other! I wish to increase my kingdom to an infinite extent! I wish to be able to say: 'All these countries, from the nearest to the most distant, belong to me! I wish to concentrate the forces of all nations into my own hands and to cause all the peoples of the earth to bend under my yoke! I wish to raise in all parts of Gaul the marvels of art that now cover Burgundy—fortified castles, magnificent palaces, gold-naved basilicas, wide and interminable highways, prodigious monuments, all of which will in all the centuries to come re-echo the name of Brunhild! Should I allow vulgar scruples to stay my hand, having such grand designs in view? No! No! Could



these children whom I unman, could these men whom I kill because they hinder my progress—could they or any of them as much as conceive my gigantic designs? Of what value to the world is the life of these obscure victims? Their bones will have turned to dust, their names will be buried in oblivion, when my name, repeated from age to age, will continue to amaze posterity!"

"And these will be valid reasons for the priests and bishops, who besiege you with applications for grants of land and money, to pardon your crimes."

"I forbid you to say an evil word against the priests; it is they who draw my triumphal car—"

"The team is rather ruinous."

"Not to me. Do the gifts that I bestow upon them impoverish me? Is not that which I give them, the overflow of my overflow? Moreover, they will aid me in restoring the imposts formerly decreed by the emperors, and thereby to replenish my coffers. Here, take this key; open the little coffer yonder on the table, and look for a roll of parchment tied in a purple ribbon."

"Here it is, madam."

"Kiss the parchment, it is written on by the hand of the representative of God on earth, a Pope—the pious Gregory himself—"

"And does the sovereign pontiff, the successor of St. Peter, as he claims, he who holds in his hands the keys of paradise, promise to open them wide for you?"

"It is but just. Have I not amply gilded those keys of paradise? Read over again to me what the parchment contains."

"Gregory to Brunhild, Queen of the Franks. The manner in which you govern the kingdom and preside over the education of your son give witness to the virtues of your Excellency, virtues that must be praised and that are pleasing to God. You did not content yourself with leaving intact to your son the

glory of temporal things, you also laid up for him the great riches of eternal life by causing, with pious maternal solicitude the germs of the true faith to take root in his soul.' ”

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE ROYAL FAMILY.

The reading of the papal epistle was interrupted at this point by the noise of many children's laughter that proceeded from the contiguous chamber. Almost immediately thereupon the three younger brothers of Sigebert, who was then absent on the journey to Germany, rushed in, followed by their governesses. The little ones ran to their great-grandmother. Childebert, the eldest of the three, was ten years of age; Corbe nine, and Merovee, the youngest, six. The poor children, born of a father who was almost worn out, even before adolescence, through all manner of early excesses, were delicate, frail, dreamy, and painful to behold. Even their mirth had a saddening effect. Their cheeks were hollow, they were sicklied over by a pallor that betrayed ill health, and that rendered their eyes exceptionally large and weird. Their long hair, the symbol of Frankish royalty, fell thin upon their shoulders. They wore short dalmaticas of gold and silver thread. The governesses respectfully bent their knees at the entrance of the hall and remained at the door, while the children ran forward and surrounded their great-grandmother. Childebert remained standing near her; Corbe and Merovee, the two youngest, climbed upon her knees, as she said to them:

“You seem to be in good spirits this morning, my dear children! What is the reason of your joy?”

"Grandmother, it is our brother Corbe, who made us laugh."

"What did Corbe do that was so funny?"

"He plucked all the feathers off his white turtle dove—and she screeched so—she screeched—"

"And you laughed—you laughed—you little imps!"

"Yes, grandmother, but our little brother Merovee wept."

"Did he laugh so hard that he cried?"

"Oh, no; I wept because the bird bled."

"And I thereupon told Merovee: 'You have no courage, if blood frightens you! And when we go to battle, will you weep there also at the sight of blood?'"

"And while Corbe was saying so to Merovee, I took a knife and cut the dove's head off. Oh, I am not afraid of blood; not I; and when I am a big man I shall go to war, not so grandmother?"

"Ah, children! You know not what you are wishing. It is easy to amuse yourselves cutting off the heads of doves, without feeling obliged some day to go to war. To make war means to ride day and night, suffer hunger, heat and cold, to sleep under tents, and what is worst of all, run the risk of being wounded and killed, all of which causes great pain. Is it not far better, dear children, to promenade quietly in a cart or a litter, to lie down in a soft bed, eat dainties, have fun all day long, and please your whims? The blood of royal families is too precious a thing to expose it recklessly, my pretty little kinglets. You have your leudes to go to war and fight the enemy in battle, your servants to kill the people who may displease or offend you; your priests to order the people to obey you. So, you see, all you have to do is to amuse yourselves, to enjoy the delights of life, happy children that you are, having nothing to say but 'I will.' Do you understand these words well, my dear little ones? Answer, Childebert, you being the eldest and therefore most intelligent."

"Oh, yes, grandmother; I am no more anxious than other

people to go to war in search of lance-thrusts; I prefer to amuse myself, and do what I please. But why, then, did our brother Sigebert go away on horseback, followed by armed men, and accompanied by Warnachaire?"

"Your brother is ailing; the physicians have advised letting him undertake a long trip for the good of his health."

"Will he be back soon?"

"To-morrow, perhaps—perhaps even to-day."

"Oh, so much the better, grandmother! So much the better! His place will not then be empty in our room—we miss him—"

"Be not too glad on that score, my little kinglets. Henceforth, Sigebert will inhabit his own royal mansion, he will have his own servants and his separate room. Oh, he will be like a little man!"

"But he is only one year older than I!"

"Oh, oh! In a year you also will be a little man, my little Childeburt," replied Brunhild exchanging a diabolical glance with Chrotechilde; "you will then also have your royal establishment and your separate room—your chamberlains, your equerries, your slaves, all of them submissive to your every whim, like dogs to the switch."

"Oh, how I would like to be a year older, so as to have all those things that you promise me!"

"And so would I like to see you older—and Corbe also—and also Merovee, I would like to see you all of the age of Sigebert."

"Patience, madam," said Chrotechilde again exchanging infernal glances with Brunhild; "patience; it will all come about—but what noise is that in the large hall? I hear numerous steps approaching—it must be seigneur Warnachaire!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### QUEEN AND MAYOR OF THE PALACE.

Chrotechilde was not mistaken. The mayor of the palace of Burgundy had arrived, and now stepped, accompanied by Sigebert, into the chamber where Brunhild and her confidante were conversing with the kinglets, and anticipating the future with diabolical foresight.

Sigebert, a boy of barely eleven, was like his brothers, frail, sickly and pale. Nevertheless, what with the excitement of the journey and the joy at seeing his brothers, a slight flush suffused his sweet, wan face, which not all the execrable precepts of his grandmother had succeeded in depriving of its angelic appearance. He ran to embrace the aged Queen and then joyfully reciprocated the caresses and answered the volley of questions of his little brothers, who crowded around him. To each he handed some slight presents, which he brought from his journey and were locked in a small coffer that he took from the hands of one of his suite, and impulsively opened in order to give his brothers a token of remembrance. Chrotechilde availed herself of a favorable moment, and approaching the Queen said in a low voice:

“Madam, if you will take my advice, keep the two slaves until evening—between now and then we shall have time to make up our minds.”

“Yes, that will be the best thing to do,” answered Brunhild; and addressing the child: “You should now retire for rest, and you can talk with your brothers about your journey. I have matters of importance to consider with Duke Warnachaire.”

Chrotechilde led away the children, and the Queen remained alone with the mayor of the palace of Burgundy, a man of tall

stature, and face cold, impenetrable, resolute. He wore a rich steel armor trimmed with gold after the Roman fashion. His long sword hung from his side, his long dagger was in his belt. After attaching a long and scrutinizing look upon Warnachaire who, however, remained impassible, Brunhild motioned him to a seat near the table, and let herself down into one opposite, saying:

"What tidings do you bring?"

"Good—and bad, madam—"

"First the bad."

"The treason of Dukes Arnolfe and Pepin, as well as the defection of several great seigneurs of Austrasia, is no longer a matter of doubt. They have deserted our colors and passed over to the camp of Clotaire II with all their men; they are now preparing to march against your army."

"I have long expected their treason. Oh, seigneurs, enriched and made powerful by the bounty of the Kings, you are yet able to carry ingratitude to such lengths! Very well! I prefer open war to subterraneous manoeuvres. The domains, Salic lands and benefices of the traitors will all return to my fisc. Proceed."

"Clotaire II raised his camp at Andernach, and has penetrated to the heart of Austrasia. Being summoned to respect the kingdoms of his nephews, whose guardian you are, he answered that he would submit only to the judgment of the *grands* of Austrasia and of Burgundy themselves."

"Fredegonde's son expects to raise the people and seigneurs of my kingdoms in rebellion against me. He deceives himself. Prompt and terrible examples will terrify all would-be traitors."

"Well said, madam!"

"All the traitors—whatever their rank may be, whatever their power, whatever the mask that they assume! Do you hear, Warnachaire, mayor of the palace of Burgundy?"



"I hear even what you do not say to me—but I bow before my Queen."

"Do you read my thoughts?"

"You take me for a traitor. You consider me your enemy, especially since your recent return from Worms."

"I am on my guard against everybody."

"Your suspicions, madam, have become certitude. You told Aimoin, one of our men, to stab me to death."

"I order only my enemies to be despatched."

"Accordingly, I am an enemy to you, madam, at least you look upon me as such. Here are the fragments of the letter, written in your own hand, and ordering Aimoin to kill me."

And the duke deposited several fragments of parchment upon the table; the Queen looked defiantly at the mayor of the palace.

"Did Aimoin give you that letter?"

"No, madam; accident placed these fragments into my hands."

"And yet you return to the palace?"

"In order to prove to you the injustice of your suspicions; that is the reason I have returned to the place where you are sovereign."

"Or perhaps you come to betray me."

"Madam, if I had wished to betray you, I would have repaired, as so many other seigneurs of Burgundy have done, not hither, but to the camp of Clotaire II. I would have placed your grandson as a hostage in his hands, and I would have remained in your enemy's camp, together with the tribes that I brought with me from Germany."

"Those tribes are devoted to my interests; they would have refused to follow you; they have come for the purpose of reinforcing my army."

"Those tribes, madam, have come for the purpose of pillage, and little do they care whether they be indulged as auxiliaries

of Brunhild or of Clotaire II, whether it be against the country of Soissons, of Burgundy or of Austrasia. These Franks have no predilections, provided only that, after they shall have fought bravely and helped in winning the victory, they will be free to ravage the vanquished country, gather a large booty, and lead numerous slaves back with them to the other side of the Rhine—such are the Franks whom I have brought.”

“And I tell you that the sight of my grandson, the infant King, asking through your mouth the assistance of the Germans, interested the barbarians in his cause, and secured the success of your mission.”

“Had you not expressly promised the Franks the pillage of the vanquished territories, they would have remained unaffected by the youth of Sigebert; they are as savage as were our fathers, the first companions of Clovis. It was with no little trouble that I succeeded in preventing them from ravaging all the districts that we traversed on our route; in their impatience of savages they imagined themselves already in vanquished territory. Every day their chiefs called upon me at the top of their voices to deliver battle, in order that they might begin the plundering and return laden with booty to Germany, before the winter season sets in.”

“Where are the Franks now?”

“I left them near Montsarran.”

“Why so far from Chalon?”

“Despite all I could do to prevent it, those savages killed and stole on their passage. To bring them here to the center of Burgundy, and then send them out again in some other direction, according as the requirements of the war may demand or the facilities for provisioning may require, would be to expose the territories that may have to be traversed to untold and unnecessary disasters. Such afflictions may fan the spark of rebellion among our people—because, as you know, madam, the

people are growing restive even on this side of the frontier of Burgundy."

"Yes—at the instigation of the traitors who have gone over to Fredegonde's son, there are some seigneurs who are seeking to raise the people in rebellion against me—against the 'Romish Woman,' as they call me. Oh, seigneurs and people will feel the weight of Brunhild's arm!"

"The enemies of Brunhild will always tremble before her; nevertheless, I fear to increase their number by exposing our people to be victimized by the barbarism of our new allies. I doubt not that the territory where I have had those troops encamp will be laid waste, but the evil effect of their conduct will be at least limited to the spot. Moreover, the location is central enough to enable us to expedite these auxiliaries in whatever direction the movements of Clotaire II may render necessary. As you see, I have acted with foresight."

"What is the temper of the army?"

"It is full of ardor; it only asks to be led to battle. The remembrance of the last two victories of Toul and Tolbiac, above all, of the immense booty, the large number of slaves that the troops carried away—all that fires them with the desire to fight the son of Fredegonde. These, madam, are the good tidings that counterbalance the evil ones. Is Brunhild still of the opinion that Warnachaire has conducted himself like a traitor, and does she still entertain the idea of having him stabbed to death?"

"A man whom one has sought to do away with, who learns the fact, and who still comes back—Oh, Warnachaire, that needs careful attention!"

"Brunhild is quick to suspect and to punish, but she is magnificent towards those who serve her faithfully."

"You have, then, a favor to ask of me?"

"Yes, madam; but only after the war is ended, or, rather,

I expect it after the victory that I shall win over Clotaire II, when I deliver him to you tied hands and feet."

"Warnachaire!" cried the Queen thrilling with wild delight at the thought of having Fredegonde's son in her power; "if you deliver Clotaire a prisoner in my hands, I shall challenge you to express a wish that Brunhild will not gratify, and—" but recollecting herself, she suddenly stopped short, cast a somber, scrutinizing glance at the mayor of the palace and proceeded: "Can it be your purpose to spread a snare for me and lull my suspicions? Warnachaire, if your purpose is to betray me—"

"Madam, you look upon me as a traitor. If you but ring that bell, instantly your chamberlains and equerries will rush in and kill me before your very eyes. So that you may consider me dead. But who is the man whom you do not suspect? Whom will you take for your general? Duke Alethee, perchance, or Duke Roccon?"

"No! Neither the one nor the other!"

"Sigowald, perhaps?"

"You are mocking! He is my personal enemy."

"Perhaps Eubelan?"

"I have not yet forgotten his criminal relations with Arnolfe and Pepin—the two traitors! He no doubt is considering how to follow their example, and to go over to the enemy. No; I will not trust Eubelan! He also is an enemy."

"Yet, madam, they are all capable of captaining the army; they are all experienced and brave chiefs."

"Yes, but I have not proposed to kill them—at least they do not know that I had any such intention—while, as to you, I have ordered your death, and what is more to the purpose, you are aware of it."

"You think me animated with a sentiment of revenge towards you because I know that you meant to have me stabbed to death. If it is the hope of vengeance that has brought me back to you,

what is there to prevent me from laying my hand upon this bell, and depriving you of the means to give the alarm?"

And the duke did what he said.

"What prevents me from drawing this dagger?"

And the duke held the glistening weapon before the eyes of Brunhild, whose first impulse was to throw herself back and her arms forward.

"What, in short, prevents me from killing you with one blow of this dagger, which is poisoned as were the daggers of Fredegonde's pages?"

And as he uttered these words, Warnachaire drew so close to Brunhild that he could strike her before she was able to utter a single cry. Excepting a first movement of surprise, the Queen did not even wink her eyes; her indomitable orbs remained resolutely fixed upon those of the mayor of the palace. With a look of disdain she pushed aside the dagger's blade, remained pensive for an instant, and then observed regretfully:

"One is bound to put faith in something. You could have killed me—that is true; you have not done so—I can not deny the fact. Your purpose is not to take revenge upon me—unless you mean to reserve me for a fate more terrible than death. But that is not likely. The man who hates does not resort to such hazardous and refined schemes. The future belongs to none. If the opportunity offers to strike an enemy, the blow is dealt hard and firmly. I therefore conclude that you are not animated by secret hatred toward me. You shall keep the command of the army. Listen, Warnachaire, Brunhild is implacable in her suspicions and her hatred, but she is magnificent towards those who serve her faithfully. Let Fredegonde's son fall into my hands, and my favor will transcend your expectations. Let us forget the past, let us be friends."

"The past is forgotten, madam, as far as I am concerned."

"Now let us argue calmly, Warnachaire. Let us sift things to the bottom. I did mean to have you killed—that is true! I

have had so many others killed! But it never was out of taste for blood. My sister Galeswinthe was killed, my husband was killed, my son was killed, my most faithful servants were killed. Single-handed have I been compelled to defend the kingdom of my son and grandsons against the kings who are bent upon my destruction. Whatever weapon was available was good to me; and after all, I have won brilliant victories, I have accomplished great things. All this notwithstanding I am hated; the Frankish seigneurs envy me; the vile Gallic plebs, whether slave or free, is silently resentful towards me, and would rebel if it were not curbed by the terror I inspire it with. But look! Look at that man! Who is he?" cried Brunhild breaking off her sentence in the middle, and, precipitately rising, she pointed at Loysik, who stood at the door connecting with the secret spiral staircase, and who was pushing aside with one arm the leather curtain that had until then hid him from the eyes of the Queen and the mayor of the palace of Burgundy. Warnachaire took a few steps towards the aged hermit laborer, who advanced slowly into the chamber, and said to him:

"Monk, how come you here? Great is your audacity to dare to introduce yourself into the Queen's apartment—who are you?"

"I am the superior of the monastery of the Valley of Charolles."

"You lie!" broke in Brunhild. "One of my chamberlains is at the abbey at this hour to seize the superior, and bring him to me in irons."

"Your chamberlain," replied the monk, "your chamberlain, together with the archdeacon and all their armed men, is at this hour a prisoner in the monastery."

To announce such news, no less improbable than offensive to the pride of Brunhild; to announce it to that implacable woman, and thus to expose himself to certain death—the action seemed so exorbitant that the Queen did not believe the



monk's words; she shrugged her shoulders with a look of disdainful pity, and said to the mayor of the palace:

"Duke, that old man is out of his senses. But how did he contrive to enter the palace?"

Other circumstances soon combined to confirm Brunhild's belief in the monk's insanity. Loysik had continued to advance slowly towards the Queen, but despite his spirit's firmness, of which he had given so many a proof during his long life, in the measure that he drew nearer to the horror-inspiring woman, his self-possession gradually forsook him, his mind became troubled, he felt his knees trembling under him, and he was constrained to lean against an ivory stand that was within his reach. The profound, unconquerable emotion was caused by the horror that the Queen inspired in the venerable monk, together with the consciousness of the terrible position in which he found himself.

With his head drooping upon his chest, he sought to collect himself and to gather his thoughts. His eyes wandered over the medal-case that lay upon the ivory stand against which he leaned. The large bronze medal that lay among the others drew to itself the monk's attention all the more readily, seeing that it was the only one of a vulgar metal, all the others being of either gold or silver. At first Loysik contemplated it mechanically, but being presently attracted towards it by an undefinable interest, he stooped over, looked at it more closely, approached his head nearer in order better to see the imprint, and deciphered the inscription that was under the august profile, that seemed to stand out lustrous from the bronze. A thrill ran over the frame of the aged man; a sudden, an extraordinary feeling seized him, a feeling in which enthusiasm, stupor and hope were mingled into one. The confusion into which his mind was thrown an instant before ceased; he felt reassured and strengthened as if he had encountered a support as unexpected as it was powerful; in short, it seemed to him a providential circumstance

to encounter—the image of Victoria in the palace of Brunhild.

Loysik had bent down in order to contemplate more closely the features of the Gallic heroine; as he recognized them, he bowed a knee and stretching his arms towards the august effigy, he murmured:

“O, Victoria—holy woman-warrior in behalf of Gaul! Your presence in this horrid place fortifies my soul; it seems to impart to me the necessary strength to save the descendants of Schanvoch, of the faithful soldier whom you called your brother, and who was one of my ancestors!”

## CHAPTER V.

### LOYSIK AND BRUNHILD.

Astonished at the oddity of the appearance and conduct of the old monk, Brunhild and Warnachaire now followed him with their eyes, now looked at each other in silence during the short instants that Loysik recognized and contemplated the image of Victoria. More and more convinced that the monk was out of his mind, the Queen lost all patience, stamped with her foot on the floor and cried:

"Duke, call in my pages; let them drive out of this room with their switches this crazy man who pretends to be the abbot of the monastery of Charolles, and who kneels before my antique medals."

Brunhild was still issuing these orders when one of the pages entered by the door that connected with the large hall, and bending a knee said to her:

"Glorious Queen, a messenger has just arrived from the army; he brings pressing despatches for seigneur Warnachaire."

"That is of greater importance, duke. Receive the messenger and return quickly to inform me of the tidings that he brings;" and then, addressing the page and pointing to Loysik, who, with head erect and firm steps was now advancing toward her, she proceeded: "Fetch in some of your assistants and drive out that dotard with your switches; the loss of his senses saves him from a more severe punishment." Saying this, the Queen rose from her seat, and stepping towards her bedchamber, once more urged the mayor of the palace: "Warnachaire, return as soon as possible and let me know what tidings the messenger bears. You will read me the despatches."

"I shall go, madam, and receive him instantly. But what of this crazy man? What is to be done with him?"

"Leave that to my pages!"

The mayor of the palace withdrew. Through the door, left open by him, and without stepping out of the apartment, the page called out to several of his companions who stood in waiting in the contiguous hall. Loysik, on his part, seeing that, without taking any more notice of him than of an insane man, the Queen was returning to her bedchamber, ran towards Brunhild, and holding before her a parchment scroll that he drew from his robe, said to her in a firm and collected voice:

"I am not crazy. This charter signed by the late King Clo-taire will prove to you that I am the superior of the monastery of Charolles, where your chamberlain and his soldiers are, at this hour, retained prisoners by my orders."

"Loysik!" exclaimed one of the young pages who entered the apartment in response to the call of their companion. "Brother Loysik here?"

"What! This monk!" cried Brunhild stupefied. "Is he Loysik, the abbot of the monastery of Charolles?"

"Yes, glorious Queen. He is the venerable abbot."

"How come you to know him?"

"He was pointed out to me at the last slave market. The worthy abbot was buying slaves to set them free. I saw him again this morning crossing one of the courtyards of the palace in the company of Samuel and two young girls."

For a moment Brunhild remained thoughtful, and then ordering the other pages out of the chamber with a wafture of her hand she addressed the one who had first come in.

"Go to Pog and tell him to get himself and his assistants ready in the cave. Let him light his fires and wait for further orders."

The page grew pale and bowed, but before leaving the chamber he cast a look of pity upon the old man. Left alone with

Loysik, the Queen paced the room for a minute in silence and with agitated steps, and then turning abruptly upon the hermit laborer said to him in a short, sharp voice:

"So you are Loysik?"

"I am Loysik, the abbot and superior of the monastery of Charolles."

"How did you penetrate into this room?"

"This morning I met near the castle a slave merchant named Samuel; I had recently bought several slaves from him; he informed me that he was coming here; knowing that it was difficult to obtain access to the palace, I asked Samuel to allow me to accompany him; at first he hesitated; two gold pieces put an end to his hesitation."

"And as the gateman had received orders to admit Samuel and his slaves, you passed along with his merchandise! And did you remain in the room below while the Jew was showing me the two slave girls?"

Loysik nodded his head in the affirmative.

"And after Samuel left the palace?"

"The Jew having informed me that this room was reached from below by the spiral staircase, I came up a short time ago and concealed myself behind the curtain; I was a witness of your conversation with one of your women. I heard everything."

Brunhild looked at the monk with a questioning and threatening mien:

"And so you overheard everything that was said between us?"

"Yes; I listened and heard everything."

"Old man—do you know who Pog and his assistants are?"

"The executioner and his men."

"How old are you?"

"The age of a man about to die."

"You expect death?"

Loysik shrugged his shoulders without answering.

"You are right," proceeded Brunhild with a satanic smile.

"To bring such tidings as you did was to run into the jaws of death."

"I came here of my own free will; your chamberlain and his men remained prisoners at the monastery. No harm will be done them."

"You are mistaken. A terrible punishment awaits them! Infamy, cowardice, shame and treachery! An officer, Brunhild's men-at-arms made prisoners by a handful of monks! Pog and his men will have work to do."

"Your men-at-arms were not cowardly; even had they been more numerous, they could not have resisted the men of the monastery and the colonists of the Valley of Charolles."

"Why, they must be redoubtable men!"

"Not that. But they are people who are determined to die free, to bury themselves under the ruins of their homes if you ignore the rights guaranteed to them by the charter of the late King Clotaire."

"How dare you invoke such a charter in my presence! A charter of him who was Fredegonde's father-in-law! A charter of the grandfather of Clotaire II, the son of Fredegonde and no less a mortal enemy of mine than his mother herself! You dare mention to me a charter signed by the grandfather of a man whom I shall pursue into his grave! Insensate old man! I would burn down the tree that lent its shade to Fredegonde's son! I would have the spring poisoned that quenched that man's thirst! In your instance, the question is not about inanimate objects, but of men, women and children who owe their freedom to the grandfather of Fredegonde's son. It is in my power to make their souls and bodies, their whole generation, writhe with pain! Oh, no later than to-morrow all the inhabitants of that accursed valley will be sent as slaves to the savage tribes that have come from Germany. It will be but an advance payment on the pillage that was promised them."

"Very well. You will send troops to the Valley. They will



force their way in, arms in hand; they will crush our inhabitants despite any resistance that they may offer, and however heroic. Men, women and children will know how to die. After a stubborn fight, your soldiers will find upon their entrance into the Valley only corpses and ashes. But you seem to forget that war has been declared between you and Fredegonde's son, that the moment is critical, and that you require all your available forces in order to resist your enemies. Execrated by the people, execrated by the seigneurs, the leading ones of whom have already joined the standard of Clotaire II, you are hardly certain of the loyalty of your own army, seeing that you have been obliged to call savage tribes to your aid and to allure them with the prospect of pillage. You seem to forget that, guided by an unerring instinct, and seeing the power of the mayors of the palaces on the ascendant, the people look upon these as the natural enemies of the Frankish Kings and are ready to revolt in support of the former. Despite the heroic resistance that they will offer, our people of the Valley will be crushed. I admit it. But do you imagine that the surrounding populations, however timid and cowed they may be, will remain impassive when they will see people of their own race slaughtered to the last man in the defense of their freedom? The horror of conquest, the hatred for slavery, the unbearable hardships of poverty have more than once driven people steeped in deeper degradation than our own to serious and stubborn revolt. Tomorrow, who knows! some frightful insurrection may break out against you, called into being by the voice of the grandes who abhor you."

"And are the seigneurs, perchance, not the enemies of your race as much as the kings?"

"Yes; after their purpose is attained, after your ruin is accomplished, the seigneurs will crush the people just as you are doing now. After the first explosion of its rage is over, the unhappy people will resume its old yoke with docility—because

the time has not yet arrived for their liberation! But what does that matter! Such a revolt at this time, in the very heart of your kingdom, when your most implacable enemy threatens your frontiers, at an hour when treason surrounds you at every turn—such a revolt would to-day mean your utter annihilation—it would deliver you and your kingdoms to your ferocious enemy, Fredegonde's son!"

At the sound of that name Brunhild trembled with rage. With her head inclined and her eyes fixed upon the ground, the Queen seemed to listen with increased attention to the words of Loysik, who continued with bitter disdain:

"Behold, then, that Queen, the audacity of whose policy has rendered her so famous! In order to cement her empire she has perpetrated crimes that will one day cause the veracity of history to be doubted. And she is about to endanger her kingdom, aye, her very life, out of hatred for a handful of inoffensive people! Did these people at all injure her? No; they were unknown to her until now; her attention was drawn to them by the cupidity of a bishop who coveted their goods. Are the people whom she wishes to drive to the heroism of despair, perchance, dangerous enemies to her? No; they only ask to be allowed to continue to live in freedom, peace and industry; if they can ever become dangerous it could only be by the example of their resistance—not unlikely, their martyrdom will provoke uprisings of which she herself will be the first and leading victim. And yet this woman would rouse them to acts of despair! She meditates punishing them on the ground that their freedom is guaranteed by a king who has lain nearly half a century in his grave! Oh, vertigo of crime! With what joy would I not see this woman throw herself headlong into the abyss of her own digging were it not that her feet must slide over the blood of my brothers!"

"Monk—it is an annoying circumstance that your age is that of a man who is about to die. I would have made you the

councillor to whose words I would have given greatest weight. I shall follow your advice. Your valley shall be spared—for the present. You speak truly. At this hour when war threatens, when my grandees but await the opportune moment to rebel against me—at such a time to drive the inhabitants of your valley to despair, to martyrdom, would be an act of folly on my part.”

Loysik promptly replied:

“My mission is accomplished; I demand of you no promises regarding the monastery and the inhabitants of the Valley of Charolles; your own interests are my best guarantee. I would now request of you a sheet of parchment for me to write to my brother—and to my monks—just a few lines. You are free to read them—it is my farewell words to my family; I also wish to request my monks to set your chamberlain, the archdeacon, and their men-at-arms free. One of your own messengers may carry the letter.”

“There is writing material on this table—you may sit down.”

Loysik took a seat at the table and proceeded to write serenely. Nevertheless such was his joy at having carried the difficult matter to so successful an issue that his hand betrayed a slight tremor. Brunhild followed him attentive and somber:

“You tremble—you must be afraid, old man!”

“The gratification of having warded off so many evils from the heads of my brothers affects me and causes my hand to tremble. Here is the letter—read it.”

Brunhild read, and said as she rolled up the parchment:

“These words of farewell are simple, they are dignified and touching. I understand better and better the powerful influence that you exercise over those people—they are the arms, you the head. Within shortly they will be a headless and, therefore, lifeless body. After the war is over I shall find it easier to reduce them to obedience. Have you anything to ask of me?”

“Nothing—except that you hasten my execution.”

"I shall be magnanimous; your unshakable firmness pleases me; I shall spare you the torture and I shall leave to you the choice of death. You may choose between poison, iron, fire or water."

"Have my throat cut."

"It shall be as you wish, monk. Have you any other favor to ask?"

"Yes," said Loysik slowly stepping towards the ivory stand on which lay the case of medals, "I would like to take with me this bronze medal; I would like to keep it with me during the short time of life that is left me. It will be sweet to me to die with my eyes fixed upon this glorious effigy."

"Let me see what medal that is—they are all mere antique curiosities. Truly, this woman is handsome, and proud under her Amazonian casque. What is the inscription here below? *Victoria, Emperor*. A woman an emperor?"

"The sovereign title was bestowed upon her after her death."

"She surely was of royal race?"

"She was of plebeian race."

"What was her life?"

"Simple—austere—illustrious! Her great soul was visible in her serenely grave features—an august countenance that this bronze has preserved for posterity. Her life was that of a chaste wife—a sublime mother—a brave Gallic woman. She never left her modest home but to follow her son to war, or to the camps. The soldiers worshipped her; they called her their mother. She brought up her son manfully in the love for his country and set him the example of the loftiest virtues. Her ambition—"

"This austere woman was ambitious!"

"As much as a mother may be for her son. Her ambition was to render that son a great citizen, the ardent desire of rendering him worthy of being chosen chief of Gaul by the people and the army."

"Brought up by so incomparable a mother, was he elected?"

"Citizens and soldiers acclaimed him with one voice. By choosing him they glorified Victoria—his stout-hearted preceptress. The brilliant qualities that they honored in him were her work. The son's election consecrated the sovereign influence of the mother—truly a sovereign in point of courage, genius and goodness. An era of glory and prosperity then opened to the country. Emancipating herself from the yoke of Rome, Gaul, free and strong, drove the Franks far away from her borders and began to enjoy the blessings of peace. And thus it came about that, from one end of our territory to the other there was one name everywhere idolized. That name—the first that the mothers taught their children after that of God—that name, so popular, that name wreathed in veneration and devoted love, was the name of Victoria!"

"In short, this woman, this incomparable mother, this divinity, this object of veneration—reigned in her son's name!"

"Yes, as virtue reigns over the world! Invisible to the eyes, it is to the heart that virtue reveals itself. As modest in her tastes as the obscurest matron in the land, Victoria fled from the glamor of honors. Living privately in a humble dwelling at Treves or Mayence, she delighted in the glory of her son, and in the wellbeing of Gaul—but not in order to reign as Queen—she despised royalty."

"And what was the cause of her haughty disdain for the great of the earth?"

"She held that the right which kings arrogated to themselves of transmitting to their children the ownership of the country with its people, like a private domain with its cattle, was an outrage to the majesty of man and a crime before God. She furthermore held that hereditary rule depraves the best dispositions, and produces the monsters that have horrified the world. Faithful to her principles, she refused to render the power hereditary in her grandson."

"She had a grandson?"

"Like you, Victoria was a grandmother."

And Loysik looked fixedly at the Queen. There was, in the manner in which Loysik accented the words addressed to Brunhild: *Like you, Victoria was a grandmother*—there was in his tone so crushing an emphasis, so withering a condemnation of the shocking means employed by the monster in order to deprave, enervate and morally kill her own grandsons, whose lives she was nevertheless compelled to respect in order that she might reign in their name, that Brunhild turned livid with rage, but controlling herself so as not to expose the wound inflicted upon her pride, dropped her eyes before the aged monk. Loysik proceeded:

"Victoria was a grandmother, and, while ruling Gaul with her genius she never dropped her distaff, which she ever plied near the cradle of her grandson; she watched over him as she had done over the child's father, with solicitous firmness; her hope was to render that child also a good citizen and brave soldier. Her hope was dashed. A frightful plot dragged into their graves both the son and grandson of the august woman. They both perished in a popular uprising."

"Ha! Ha!" cried Brunhild breaking forth into a burst of sardonic laughter, as if her gathering hatred for the Gallic heroine was assuaged. "Such, then, is the justice of God!"

"Such is the justice of God—the crime enabled Victoria to bequeath to the admiration of posterity a noble example of patriotism and abnegation! After the death of her son and grandson, and being urgently requested by the people, the army and the senate to govern Gaul—Victoria refused. Aye," added Loysik in answer to a gesture of surprise that escaped Brunhild, "aye, Victoria refused twice. She designated the men whom she considered worthiest of being chosen chiefs of the country, and rendered to them the all-powerful support of her own popularity and the advice of her exceptional wisdom for the good



of the country. Victoria continued to live modestly in her retreat, and so long as her life lasted, Gaul remained powerful and prosperous, rid both of the Romans and the Franks. Victoria died. Her death was the climax of a series of crimes of which her son and grandson were the first victims. The illustrious woman died poisoned."

"Ha! Ha!" cried Brunhild breaking forth anew in a burst of sardonic laughter. "Monk—monk—ever the justice of God!"

"Ever the justice of God—never was the death of the greatest geniuses that ever shed splendor upon the world wept as the death of Victoria was wept! One would have thought it was the funeral of Gaul! In the largest cities, in the obscurest villages, tears flowed from all eyes. Everywhere these words were heard, broken with sobs: 'We have lost our mother!' The soldiers, those rough warriors of the legions of the Rhine, whose faces a hundred battles had bronzed—those soldiers wept like children. The mourning was universal; imposing as death itself. At Mayence, where Victoria died, the spectacle of sorrow was sublime. Reclining upon an ivory couch draped in gold cloth, Victoria lay in state a week. Men, women, children, the army, the senate crowded the street of her house. Each came to contemplate for a last time in pious grief the august features of her who was the dearest, the most admired glory of Gaul—"

"Monk!" cried Brunhild seizing the arm of the venerable old man and seeking to drag him after her; "the executioners must be waiting—"

Loysik exerted only the force of inertia to resist the Queen; he remained motionless and continued in a calm and solemn voice:

"The mortal remains of Victoria the Great were placed upon the pyre and disappeared in a flame, pure, brilliant and radiant as the life that she had lived. Finally, in order to do honor to her virile genius across the ages, the people of Gaul decreed to her the sovereign title that she had ever declined out

of her sublime modesty. It is now more than four centuries ago since that bronze was cast in the effigy of *Victoria, Emperor.*"

As he uttered these last words, Loysik took the medal in his hands. Brunhild, whose rage now reached a paroxysmal pitch, snatched the august image from the old monk's hands, dashed it on the floor, and trampled upon it in blind rage.

"Oh, Victoria! Victoria!" cried Loysik, his face beaming with exalted enthusiasm. "Oh, woman Emperor! Heroine of Gaul! I can now die! Your life will have been to Brunhild the punishment for her crimes!" And turning toward the Queen, who continued a prey to the frenzied vertigo that had seized her, he exclaimed triumphantly: "The glory of Victoria, like the bronze that you are trampling under foot, defies your impotent rage!"

At this point Warnachaire burst into the chamber crying:

"Madam—madam—disastrous tidings! A second messenger has just arrived from the army. By a skilful manoeuvre Clotaire II surrounded our German allies; the prospect of booty carried them over to the enemy's banners; he is now advancing with forced marches upon Chalon. Your presence, together with that of the young princes, in the army, is indispensable at this critical moment. I have just issued the necessary orders for your immediate departure. Come, madam, come! The safety of your kingdoms, perhaps your own life, is at stake—as you know, the son of Fredegonde is implacable!"

Struck with stupor at the sudden news Brunhild at first remained petrified, with her foot still resting upon the medal of Victoria. An instant later she had recovered herself, and in a clamorous voice, that sounded like the roar of an infuriate lioness, she cried:

"To me, my leudes! A horse—a horse! Brunhild will either be killed at the head of her army or the son of Fredegonde will meet his death in Burgundy. Send for the young princes! To horse. All forces on the march!"



PART III.

THE CAMP OF CLOTAIRE.

## CHAPTER I.

### WEEDING KINGLETS.

The village of Ryonne, situated on the banks of the little river of Vigienne, lies about three days' march from Chalon. Around the village a portion of the troops of Clotaire II, son of Fredegonde, lie encamped. The King's tent has been set up under a clump of trees in the middle of the village. The sun has only just risen. Not far from the royal shelter stands a farmhouse. It is larger than any other in sight, and also in better condition. Its door is closed, and two Frankish soldiers are on guard before it. The only light that enters the house penetrates through a little window. From time to time one of the soldiers who is posted outside, looks in and listens through the window. A worm-eaten old trunk, two or three stools, a few household utensils, and a long box filled with straw—such are the furnishings of the place. On that rough straw couch are three children. They are clad in gold- and silver-trimmed silk clothes. Who may these children be, so magnificently clad, yet lying on that pallet like the children of slaves? They are the children of Thierry, the late King of Burgundy; they are the great-grandchildren of Brunhild. The three children are asleep in one another's arms. Sigebert, the eldest, lies between his two brothers; Merovee's head, the youngest of the three, lies on Sigebert's breast. Corbe, the second, has his arm around his eldest brother's neck. The faces of the little princes, as they lie soundly asleep, are half hidden by their long hair, the symbol of the royal family. They seem to lie peacefully, almost happily. Especially the face of the eldest has an expression of angelic serenity. As the sun mounted higher and higher above

the horizon, it presently darted its luminous and warm rays upon the group of sleeping children. Awakened by the heat and the brilliancy of the light, Sigebert passed his white wan hands over his large and still half-closed eyes; he opened them; looked around with surprise; sat up on the pallet; and, as if suddenly remembering the sad reality, he threw himself back upon the straw. Tears soon inundated his pale visage, and he laid his hands over his lips in order to suppress the sobs that were struggling to escape. The poor child feared to awaken his younger brothers. They were still soundly asleep, and, despite the movements of Sigebert, who, as he sat up, caused the head of Merovee to roll upon the straw, the latter's profound rest was not interrupted. Corbe, however, who was also half awakened by the heat of the sun, rubbed his eyes and mumbled:

"Chrotechilde, I want my milk—my cake—I am hungry."

"Corbe," Sigebert whispered to him with his face bathed in tears and his lips palpitating; "brother—wake up. Alack, we are no longer in our palace at Chalon."

At these words, Corbe woke up completely, and answered with a sigh:

"I thought we were in our palace."

"We are not there any longer, brother; I am so sorry!"

"Why do you say that? Are we no longer the King's sons?"

"We are poor King's sons—we are here in prison. But grandmother, where is she? And where is our brother Childebert? Where can they be? Perhaps they also are prisoners."

"And whose fault is it? It is the fault of the army that betrayed us!" cried little Corbe angrily. "I heard everybody say so around us—the troops fled without striking a blow. I heard them say that Duke Warnachaire prepared the treason! Oh, the scoundrel!"

"Not so loud, Corbe, not so loud!" cautioned Sigebert with a smothered voice. "You will wake up Merovee—poor little"



fellow! I wish I could sleep like him. I would not then be thinking."

"You are always weeping, Sigebert; tell me why?"

"Are we not now in the hands of our grandmother's enemies?"

"Be not afraid; she will soon come with another army and set us free; she will kill Clotaire. Are you not hungry?"

"No! Oh, no! I am neither hungry nor thirsty."

"The sun has long been up; they will surely soon bring us something to eat. Grandmother was right; war is tiresome and uncomfortable, but only when one is not a prisoner. But how Merovee does sleep! Wake him up!"

"Oh, brother, let him sleep quietly; perhaps he also thinks, as you did, that he is in our palace at Chalon."

"So much the worse! We woke up—I do not want him to sleep any longer—why should he?"

"Corbe, you can not have a good heart."

"Sigebert! They are opening the door—they are bringing us something to eat."

Indeed, the door opened. Four personages stepped into the house. Two of them were clad in jackets of hides, and one of these carried a roll of rope. Clotaire II and Warnachaire accompanied the two men. The duke had his battle armor on, the King a long light blue silk robe bordered with ermine.

"Seigneur King," said Duke Warnachaire in a low voice, "will you not wait for the return of Constable Herpon?"

"Who can tell whether he will be back to-day?"

"You must remember that his horses are fresh; Brunhild's are exhausted with the march. It is impossible that he should have failed to overtake the Queen at the foot of the Jura mountains, into which she will not dare to risk herself. The constable may be back with her from one moment to another."

"Warnachaire, I am in a hurry to be done with it; such a

blow will be of little moment to Brunhild; why delay it to wait for her to witness? It should be done quickly."

Saying this, the young King made a sign to the two men, who thereupon stepped towards the three children on the straw pallet. The sleep of childhood is so profound that little Mero-vee was not yet awakened by the noise. His two brothers, however, crouched back into the remotest corner of the pallet, stunned and frightened, especially at the sinister faces of the two men clad in hide jackets. The two cowering children held each other in a close embrace, trembling and without uttering a word. At a second sign from Clotaire II, one of the two men, he who carried the coil of rope, unwound it and stepped closer to the children, while his companion drew from his belt a long, straight and sharp knife, of the kind that is used by butchers; he slightly tested the freshly sharpened edge of the blade with the tip of his thumb, while Fredegonde's son urged the executioners on with the impatient order:

"Move on, slaves; hurry up!"

The executioner made to the King a sign with his hand, as if to say: "You need not fear, I shall be quick about it." In the meantime his assistant had come within reach of the children, who, livid and dumb with terror, trembled so convulsively that their teeth were heard to chatter. The executioner's assistant placed a hand on each, and without turning his head asked:

"Which first? The taller, the smaller, or the one asleep?"

"Begin with the eldest," answered Clotaire II in a hollow imperious voice. "Hurry up! Hurry up!"

The two children retreated still farther back into the corner in which the pallet was placed and did not loosen their hold upon each other.

"Mercy!" cried Sigebert in a smothered and plaintive voice. "Mercy for my brother! Mercy for me!"

"We are a King's sons!" cried Corbe with even more anger

than fear. "If you do any harm to me, my grandmother will have you all killed!"

At this moment, awakened at last by the noise, little Mero-vee sat up on the pallet and looked around with wonderment but not in terror. The six-year-old child could not understand what was going on; he rubbed his eyes and turning his little head, with his eyes still swollen with sleep, hither and thither, he looked alternately from the four new arrivals to his brothers, as if asking what it all meant. The King having said "Begin with the eldest," the assistant seized Sigebert. More dead than alive, the hapless child offered no resistance, but let himself be bound hands and feet, as the lamb does in the slaughter-house; he only murmured in a woebegone voice:

"Seigneur King! Good seigneur King, do not have us killed—why would you have us killed? We are willing to be slaves. Send us out to herd your sheep far away from here; we shall obey you in all things; but, O, seigneur, mercy, good seigneur King, mercy! Mercy for my two little brothers and for me!"

As a worthy grandson of Clotaire I, Clotaire II remained unmoved by the prayers of his victim.

Sigebert passed from the hands of the assistant to those of the executioner. The child's arms were bound behind his back, and his feet were tied together; his physical prostration rendered him unable to keep upon his feet. He fell upon his knees before the slaughterer. The latter took hold of the child by its long hair and firmly bending its neck back against his own knee left the child's throat well distended and exposed to the knife. With a smothered voice and casting an agonizing glance at the mayor of the palace Sigebert murmured:

"Warnachaire, you who called me during our late journey your 'dear boy,' will you not implore mercy for me—"

These were the innocent child's last words. Clotaire II gave a motion of impatience. The executioner approached his

knife to the child's throat, but doubtlessly experiencing a fleeting sentiment of pity, he turned his head aside and shut his eyes as if to escape seeing the dying glance of his victim. The movement was but transitory, the long knife quickly plowed its way through the child's throat and, operated as a saw, cut down until it struck the vertebrae of the neck. Two jets of purple blood spurted from the wide-gaping wound and fell in opposite directions like a ruddy dew on a fold of the robe of Fredegonde's son and upon the iron greaves of Duke Warnachaire. Withdrawing his knee which had served him for a block, the executioner left the body to its own weight. It fell backward; the inert head rebounded upon the floor; a slight tremor ran over the expiring child's shoulders and limbs, and the lifeless body of Sigebert sank motionless in a pool of blood.

During the time that the murder of Sigebert was enacting, Merovee wept scalding tears on the straw where he remained seated; the child wept because, as he murmured, 'they were hurting' his brother, but with one so young no thought of death could enter his head. His brother Corbe, however, a boy of violent and vindictive character, did not emulate the gentle resignation of Sigebert. He fought and shrieked, and tried to bite and scratch the assistant who was to bind him fast. The latter was only tying the last knots when the first child's throat was cut.

"Dogs! Murderers!" cried Corbe in his weak, shrill voice, while his eyes flashed fire from the midst of his pale face. He straightened himself and he writhed so convulsively in his bonds that the executioner was hardly able to hold him. "Oh!" he screamed, grinding his teeth and panting for breath in the struggle; "Oh, my grandmother will put you all to the torture for this—you will see—you will see—Pog will get you, yes—every one of you—you will be put to awful tortures!"

Turning towards the mayor of the palace of Burgundy, Clotaire II said, pointing his finger at Corbe: "Warnachaire, it

would have been impolitic to leave this hateful and vindictive child alive! Even if dethroned he would have become a dangerous man."

It took both the Frankish executioners to overpower Corbe. But neither his screams nor leaps could avail him. Seeing that he struggled violently in his bonds, the assistant knelt down upon the child's chest in order to pin him to the ground, while the executioner himself wound around his wrist the long hair of the young prince, and was thus able to draw the head towards himself so as to leave the neck distended and exposed to the knife. A second time the blade cut into the flesh; a second time the blood spurted out—and the corpse of Corbe rolled over upon that of his brother.

Only little Merovee was left. The child had remained on the straw pallet. Whether out of ignorance of the danger that he was in, or whether due to the thoughtlessness of infancy, when he saw the executioner's assistant approach him, he rose, walked towards him submissively, and referring to the resistance that Corbe offered, said with infantine innocence as he wiped off his tears:

"My brother Sigebert did not resist—I shall be as gentle as Sigebert—but do not hurt me."

Saying this the child then threw his little blonde head back and himself offered his neck to the executioner.

At that instant, a rider covered with dust burst into the house crying in a voice half choked with gladness:

"Great King! I have ridden ahead of Constable Herpon. He brings Queen Brunhild prisoner. After two days of the hottest chase, he succeeded in overtaking her at Orbe, in the foot-hills of the Jura."

"Oh, my mother! You will soon thrill with joy in your sepulchre. I have, at last, in my power the woman whom you were not able to smite!" exclaimed the son of Fredegonde. He then turned to the executioners who still held Merovee in their

hands: "Do not kill that child—let him be taken to my tent. Wait for my orders. You do not know, oh, great Queen, what glory awaits you!" added Clotaire II with an expression of diabolic ferocity. And addressing Warnachaire: "Let us now go out and give a worthy reception to this daughter of a King, this wife of a King, this grandmother and great-grandmother of Kings—Brunhild, Queen of Burgundy and Austrasia! Come, come!"



## CHAPTER II.

### AT BAY.

What noise is that? It sounds like the distant and muffled tread and cries of a large multitude. Aye, large indeed is the multitude that is advancing towards the village of Ryonne, where the army of Clotaire II is encamped. Whence does that multitude proceed? Oh, it comes from far. It started as far away as the slopes of the Jura; it was swelled on the road by large numbers of the people who inhabited the cities, hamlets and villages that it crossed; slaves and colonists, young and old men, women and children, poured from their homes, their fields, their huts; at the risk of imprisonment, the lash and even mutilation at their return, slaves and colonists joined the swelling multitude; at the risk of the fatigue of the rapid march, that for some, lasted two days, for others, one day, half a day, two hours, or one hour, according to where they fell in line, city people left their pursuits and eagerly turned into the surging human stream. But what was it that attracted so eagerly the frantic, swelling crowd? It was these words, that flew from mouth to mouth: "Queen Brunhild is passing—she is taken prisoner to be delivered to Fredegonde's son!"

Aye, such was the hatred, the disgust, the horror, the dread inspired in Gaul by those two names—Fredegonde and Brunhild—that large numbers of people found it impossible to resist the curiosity of knowing and seeing what was to be the issue of the capture of Brunhild by Fredegonde's son. The multitude, accordingly, moved in the direction of the village of Ryonne. Fifty horsemen in arms headed the march and cleared the way. Behind them rode Constable Herpon armed cap-a-pie,

and closely after him, riding between two other warriors on horseback who held her palfrey by the bridle appeared Brunhild. The old Queen's arms were pinioned behind her back and she was bound upon her saddle. Her long, gold-embroidered purple robe was dusty and mud-bespattered, and hung in tatters from her body. The indomitable woman had offered a desperate resistance when she was finally overtaken by the constable and his men. One of her sleeves, together with half her corsage, was torn off, and left bare her neck and shoulders and one of her arms, all of which were covered with livid, bluish bruises, partly hidden under her long, grey, tangled and tumbled hair to which fragments of dung and ordure, that the people had flung at her while whelming her with insults, were still seen to cling. From time to time, the fettered lioness gave her head a convulsive shake in the effort to disengage her face from the disheveled locks before it—at such times, glimpses were obtained of her hideous, horrible visage. Before being finally caught, the woman had defended herself like a wild animal at bay. The desire of her captors was to take her alive to the son of her mortal enemy. In the brutal hand to hand struggle of Constable Herpon and his armed men with Brunhild she was smitten with their fists in the face and kicked in the body. Her arms, shoulders, bosom, limbs and face were severely bruised. One of her eyes bore the mark of a violent blow, given with the hilt of a sword. The eyelids and a portion of the cheek disappeared under a large blue and black contusion. Her upper lip was slit and swollen as the result of another blow, that broke in two of her teeth and bathed her lower face in blood. The blood had since dried on her skin and added to the hideousness of her appearance. Nevertheless, of such temper was that being's savage energy, that her forehead retained its wonted haughtiness, her eyes their wonted pride. Firmly fettered though she was, bruised, tattered, covered with dust, mud and even dung, Brunhild still looked redoubtable. Impreca-

tions, hisses, jeers, threats, hurled at her along the route—nothing had been able to shake her inflexible soul.

In his haste to relish the sight of his captive and victim, Clotaire left the village and rode out accompanied by Warnachaire to meet her. Other seigneurs of Burgundy and Austrasia, who sided with Clotaire, also followed him. Among the latter were Dukes Pepin, Arnolfe, Alethee, Eubelan, Roccon, Sigowald, the Bishop of Troyes and many more.

Seeing the King from a distance, Constable Herpon hastened towards his sovereign, after issuing his orders to the two riders who led Brunhild's mount. The latter immediately spurred their horses and rode rapidly upon the heels of the constable leading the fallen Queen between them. Old though she was, had she not been pinioned, Brunhild would have held her saddle like an Amazon. But hindered by the bonds that bound her, she was unable to follow with suppleness the motion of her mount. As a consequence, the gallop of her palfrey threw Brunhild's body into ridiculous jumps and postures. The escort of armed men on horseback, together with the mob, followed her on the run and whelmed her with fresh jeers and hisses. Constable Herpon finally reached the King, leaped from his horse and pointing to the old Queen said to his men:

"Set her on the ground. Leave only her arms tied behind her back."

The riders obeyed, and the cords that bound Brunhild to the saddle were unfastened. But the long pressure of the ligaments had so benumbed her limbs that she was unable to stand upon her legs and forced her to drop upon her knees. Immediately she cried out, lest her fall be construed as an evidence of weakness or fear:

"My limbs are numb—Brunhild does not fall upon her knees before her enemies!"

The Frankish warriors raised and held the Queen. Her favorite palfrey, the same that she rode on the day of the bat-

tle, and from which she had just alighted, stretched out its intelligent head and gently licked the Queen's hands, tied up behind her. For the first time, but only for a moment, were Brunhild's features expressive of aught but savage pride and concentrated rage. Turning her head over her shoulder, she said to the animal in a voice that sounded almost tender:

"Poor animal; you did your best to save me with the swiftness of your flight—but your strength gave out; and now you bid me adieu in your own way; you entertain no hatred for Brunhild; but Brunhild is proud of being hated by all others—because she is feared by all—"

Clotaire II drew slowly near to the old Queen. A wide circle consisting of Frankish seigneurs, warriors of the army and the mob that had followed formed itself around the son of Fredegonde and her mortal enemy. What with the sight of that King, and what with her own determination not to falter in his presence, Brunhild summoned an energy and strength that seemed superhuman. Addressing the warriors who held her under the arms she shouted savagely:

"Back—take your hands from me—I can stand alone!"

Indeed, she stood unsupported, and took two steps towards the King as if to prove to him that she felt neither weakness nor fear. Thus Clotaire II and Brunhild found themselves face to face in the center of a circle that drew closer and closer. The vast crowd was hushed in profound silence; with bated breath the issue of the terrible interview was awaited. With his arms crossed over his heaving breast, Fredegonde's son contemplated his victim wrapt in silent and savage joy. Brunhild broke the silence. With head erect and intrepid mien she said in her sharp, penetrating voice that resounded clearly at a distance:

"First of all, good morning to good Warnachaire, the cowardly soldier, who ordered my army to flee. Thanks to your infamous treachery, here am I—I, the daughter, wife and mother of Kings—with my arms pinioned, my face bruised with the fist-

blows given me, soiled with dung, mud and ordure thrown at me by the people along the road.—Triumph, son of Fredegonde! Triumph, young man! For two days the populace have been whelming with hisses, contempt and dirt the Frankish royalty, your own, the royalty of your own family in my person! You have vanquished me, but never will the royalty recover from the blow that you have dealt me!”

“Glorious King,” said the Bishop of Troyes to Clotaire II in a low voice, “order that woman to be gagged; her tongue is more venomous than an asp’s.”

“On the contrary, I wish her to speak; I shall enjoy the torture that her pride undergoes.”

While the prelate and the King were exchanging these words, Brunhild had proceeded with an ever more resonant voice, waving her head at the crowd of warriors:

“Stupid people! Besotted people!—You respect us, you fear us, us of the royal family,—and yet it is a royal face that you see before you, bruised with fist-blows, like that of any vile slave! The mother of your King—that Fredegonde who was prostituted to all the lackeys of Chilperic’s palace—must often have looked as I do now, every time that she was beaten by one of her vulgar associates!”

“Dare you speak of prostitution, you old she-wolf bleached in debauchery!” cried Clotaire II in a no less resonant voice than Brunhild.

“Your mother Fredegonde had my husband Sigebert and my son Childebart stabbed to death by her pages—”

“And you, miscreant, did not you have Lupence, the Bishop of St. Privat murdered by Count Oabale, one of your lovers?”

“And did not Fredegonde in turn cause Pretextat to be assassinated in the basilica of Rouen, as a punishment for his having married me to your brother Merovee—”

“My brother Merovee married you, thanks to your sorceries, abominable witch! And after you abused his youth you goaded



him to parricide—you armed him against his own father, who was also mine.”

“And a loving father! Not content with having his son Merovee’s throat cut at Noisy, Chilperic delivered to the dagger and the poison of Fredegonde all the children whom he had from his other wives.”

“You lie, monster! You lie!” cried Clotaire II livid with rage and grinding his teeth.

“Seigneur King, do order the woman to be gagged,” again whispered the Bishop of Troyes to the King.

“Of the many wives whom your father Chilperic repudiated there still remained one alive, Andowere,” Brunhild proceeded; “Andowere had two children, Clodwig and Basine; the mother was strangled, the son stabbed to death, and the daughter delivered to the pages of Fredegonde!”

“Hold your tongue, infamous woman, who introduce concubines into your grandsons’ chamber for the purpose of enervating them and reigning in their stead; who order the assassination of whatever honorable people revolt at such a crime—as happened to Berthoald, the mayor of the palace of Burgundy, whom you ordered killed; as happened to Bishop Didier whom you had stoned to death.”

“After Chilperic had my husband assassinated, he seized my relative Sigila and ordered the joints of his limbs to be burned with red-hot irons, his nose cut off, his eyes put out, red-hot irons thrust under his nails, and finally his hands, then his arms, then his lower legs and finally his upper legs cut off—every imaginable torture!”

“Warnachaire!” cried Clotaire purple with rage, “remember all those tortures; forget not one; we shall presently find whom to apply them to;” and addressing Brunhild, “And did not you yourself stain your hands with the blood of your grandson Theudebert after the battle of Tolbiac? And was not the head of his son, a child of five years dashed against a stone at your orders?”



"And what blood is that, still fresh, with which your own robe is bespattered? It is the innocent blood of three children, my grandsons, whose kingdoms you have secured to yourself by their murder! And that is the manner in which we all of us, people of the royal family, act. In order to reign we kill our children, our relatives, our mates. Chilperic stood in the way of your mother Fredegonde's vulgar pleasures, and she had him despatched!"

"Gag that woman!" commanded Clotaire in a paroxysm of rage.

"Oh, my dear sons in Christ," shouted the Bishop of Troyes, endeavoring to drown the panting voice of Brunhild; "place no faith in the words of this execrable woman in matters that concern the family of our glorious King Clotaire II.—These are infamous calumnies!"

"Warriors, I wish before I die, to unveil to you all the crimes of your Kings."

"Hold your tongue, demon! Female Beelzebub!" again broke in the Bishop of Troyes in a thundering voice, and he added in a lower voice to Clotaire: "Glorious King, do you not think it is high time to have the woman gagged? If you do not, you must prepare to hear even worse accusations."

Two leudes, who at the first orders of Clotaire had looked for a scarf, threw it over Brunhild's mouth and tied it behind her head.

"Oh, monster, spewed out of Hell!" the Bishop of Troyes thereupon proceeded to apostrophise Brunhild, "if this glorious family of Frankish Kings, to whom the Lord granted the possession of Gaul in reward for their Catholic faith and their submission to the Church, if these Kings had committed the crimes that you have the audacity of charging them with in your diabolical spirit of mendacity, could they, as the visible support given to them by God in overpowering their enemies, shows them to be—could they be the beloved sons of our holy Church? Would

we, the fathers in Christ of the people of Gaul, order these to obey their Kings and masters, and to submit to their will?—would we do so if they were not the elect of the Lord? Go to—witch! You are the horror of the world! The world now spews you back into hell, where you come from. Return thither, Oh, monster, who sought to unnerve your grandsons with debauchery, in order that you might reign in their place! Oh, my brothers in Christ, who of you all does not shudder with horror at the base thought of the unheard-of crime that this execrable woman has gloried in?”

That crime, the most execrable of all that the infamous Queen had admitted, aroused so profound an indignation among the assembled crowd that one, unanimous cry of vengeance issued from its midst:—

“Death to Brunhild! Let the earth be rid of her! Let her perish amidst tortures!”

## CHAPTER III.

### THE DEATH OF BRUNHILD.

Three days had elapsed since Brunhild fell into the power of Clotaire II. The sun had crossed the zenith. A man with a long white beard, clad in a hooded brown robe, and mounted upon a mule was following the road, upon which, escorted by the armed men of her mortal foe, and leading behind her a mob that rent the air with execrations, Brunhild had shortly before ridden to the village of Ryonne. The venerable old man was Loysik. He had escaped death by reason of the Queen's precipitate departure from the castle. One of the young brothers of the community accompanied the old monk on foot, guiding his mule by the bridle. From the opposite direction, a warrior, armed cap-a-pie, was climbing on horseback the rough road that Loysik was at the same time slowly descending with his mule. When the Frank had come within a few paces of the old man, the latter opened up a conversation with him:

"Are you of King Clotaire's suite?"

"Yes, holy man."

"Is he still at the village of Ryonne?"

"Yes; he will be there till this evening.—I am to ride ahead and prepare his lodgings on the route."

"Is Duke Roccon among the seigneurs who accompany the King?"

"Yes, monk; Duke Roccon is with the King."

"Is it true, as I hear, that Queen Brunhild has been taken prisoner and carried to King Clotaire, who has also captured her grandchildren?"

"That is all old news. Where do you come from that you do not know what has happened?"

"I come from Chalon.—What did the King do with his prisoner and her grandchildren?"

"The steep ascent has taken the wind out of my horse and he needs a little rest. So I shall tell you what has happened—all the more willingly, seeing that it is a good augury to meet a priest, especially a monk, at the start of a journey."

"Do let me know, I beg you; what has been done with Brunhild and her grandchildren?"

"There were only three of the children captured on the banks of the Saone. The fourth, Childebert, could be found nowhere.—Was he killed in the melee?—Did he escape?—No one can tell.—"

"And the other three?"

"The eldest and the second one were killed."

"In the battle?"

"No—no.—They were killed in the village—yonder. The King had them killed under his own eyes, in order to be certain of their death; he wanted to obviate having them turn up some day, and demand their kingdom back from him. But it is said that the King granted his life to the third.—I think he was wrong in that.—But what ails you, holy father; you seem to shiver. To be sure, the morning is rather chilly."

"And what became of Queen Brunhild?"

"She arrived at the village with a magnificent escort! A veritable triumphal march! Dung for incense, and hootings for acclamation!"

"I suppose the King ordered her to be put to death immediately upon her arrival?"

"No; she is still alive."

"Did Clotaire have mercy upon her?"

"Clotaire—have mercy upon Brunhild!—Holy man, you must come from far away to talk as you do! Brunhild was tak-

en three days ago to that village that you see yonder; she was taken to the house where her grandchildren were killed. Two expert executioners and four assistants, equipped with all manner of instruments, were locked up with the old Queen; that was three days ago, and she is not yet dead. I must add that she was not tortured at night; the nights were left to her to recover strength. Moreover, seeing that she undertook to starve herself, food was forced down her throat—spiced wines and flour soaked in milk. That has kept her sufficiently alive.—But what makes you shiver so? It is not so chilly!”

“Yes; the morning is chilly.—And did Clotaire witness the tortures that were inflicted upon the Queen during those three days?”

“The door of the house was locked and guarded by sentinels. But there is a little window through which one can look inside. Through that opening, the King, the dukes, the leudes, the Bishop of Troyes and a few other preferred personages went from time to time to contemplate the victim in her agony. Being a connoisseur, Clotaire never took a look inside when Brunhild was screaming; at times the woman screamed loud enough to be heard clean across the village; he never went to see her at such times; but the moment she began to moan, he walked to the window and peeped in; it is said the sufferings of victims in the torture are intenser when they moan than when they scream out aloud. It was a protracted holiday for the whole village. Like the generous King that he is, Clotaire allowed a large number of people, who followed Brunhild to the village, to remain to the end of the tortures, and had provisions distributed among them. Oh, holy man, you should have heard how they kept time with their hootings to the screams of the Queen.—But I see my horse has regained his wind—adieu, holy man. If you wish to witness a spectacle that you never saw and never will see again you would better hurry. They say there are yet to be some extraordinary incidents to wind up the torture. The King has sent for one of

the camels that carry his baggage. What he purposes to do with the camel is still a secret. Adieu, give me your blessing."

"I wish you a happy journey."

"Thank you, holy man; but you had better hurry, because as I was leaving the village they went for the camel and took him out of his stable."

Pricking his horse with his spurs, the rider rode off at a brisk pace. Shortly afterwards, Loysik arrived at the entrance of the village of Ryonne. The aged monk alighted from his mule and asked the young brother to wait for him. A leude, from whom Loysik inquired after Duke Roccon, took him to the tent of the Frankish seigneur, contiguous to that of the King. Almost immediately afterwards the monk was taken to the duke, who said to him in a tone of respectful deference:

"You here, my good father in Christ?"

"I come with a just petition to you."

"If it is at all in my power, the matter is granted."

"Are you a friend of King Clotaire? Have you any influence with him?"

"If you have any favor to prefer to him, you could hardly arrive at a better time."

"I come for no favors from the King—I come for justice. Here is a charter given by his grandfather Clotaire I. As a matter of law, it requires no confirmation, seeing that the concession is absolute. But the Bishop of Chalon is giving us trouble. He is laying claims upon the goods of the monastery, upon those of the inhabitants of the Valley, and, as a consequence, upon their freedom, notwithstanding both their goods and their freedom are guaranteed by this charter.—Would you be willing to request Clotaire, who is now the King of Burgundy, to attach his seal to the charter issued by his grandfather, in order to insure its enforcement?"

"Is that all you wish to ask of the King?—The King honors the memory of his glorious grandfather too highly to fail to con-



firm a charter issued by that great Prince. Clotaire must now be in his tent. Wait for me here, my father in Christ. I shall be back soon."

During the short absence of the Frankish seigneur, Loysik could hear the uproar of the impatient crowd and warriors calling aloud for Brunhild. Duke Roccon returned quickly with the old charter of Clotaire I, to which Clotaire II had attached his seal under the following freshly written words:

"We will it, and we so order all our leudes, dukes, counts and bishops, that the above charter, signed by our glorious grandfather Clotaire, be upheld in force and respected in all its provisions in the present and in the future, and we do so in the belief that we thereby do honor to our glorious ancestor. And those who are to succeed me will uphold this donation inviolate, if they wish to share the life everlasting, and if they wish to be saved from the everlasting flames. Whoever in any manner does violence to this donation, may the gateman of heaven diminish his share of heaven; whoever may add to the donation, may the gateman of heaven add something unto him."

The aged monk inquired from the duke who it was that wrote the last words to the charter, and was not a little surprised to hear that it was the Bishop of Troyes.

"You must, then, have said nothing to the King concerning the pretensions of the Bishop of Chalon—"

"I did not consider that necessary. I said to Clotaire: 'I request you to confirm this charter, which your grandfather granted to a holy man of God.' 'I can refuse nothing to my loyal servitors,' he answered, and he charged the bishop to write what was proper. That being done, the King attached his royal seal under the writing."

"Roccon," said the venerable monk, "I thank you—adieu—"  
But recollecting himself, Loysik added:

"You told me that the moment was favorable to obtain favors from the King—promise me that you will ask him to enfranchise

a few slaves of the royal fisc, and to send them to me to the monastery of the Valley of Charolles."

"Ah, my father in Christ! I knew full well that our conversation would not be done without your making some demand of enfranchisement."

"Roccon, you have a wife and children—the accidents of war are changeable. Brunhild is now vanquished and a prisoner; but, if that implacable Queen, who has emerged so often victorious from the field of battle, had not been betrayed by her own army and her auxiliaries—had she, on the contrary, vanquished Clotaire, what would your lot have been, what the lot of all the seigneurs of Burgundy, who took the side of the King? What would have become of your wife, of your daughters?"

"Brunhild would have ordered my head cut off; she would have delivered my wife and daughters to the savage tribes of the other side of the Rhine as slaves!—Malediction! My two daughters Bathilde and Hermangarde, slaves!—The perspiration gathers on my temples at the bare thought of such a thing—let us not speak of it!"

"On the contrary, do let us speak of it! Who knows but that among those unknown slaves, whose freedom I am asking, there may be some with daughters whom they love as much as you love yours.—Judge of the joy that their deliverance would give them by the joy that you and your children would feel if, having become slaves, you were to be set free. Roccon, it is in your power to afford such ineffable joy to some captives.—Keep your dear daughters in mind."

"Very well my dear father in Christ, I promise you ten slaves. Clotaire will not refuse them to me as my share of the booty of this war."

"Seigneur duke," said a servant who hurried into the tent, "the promenade of the camel is about to begin."

"Oh! Oh! It is to be one of the best spectacles of the feast.—Come, my father in Christ!"

"Oh!" cried the aged man horrified. "I do not wish to stay an instant longer in this horrible place.—Adieu, Roccon!"

"Adieu, good father, you will pray to God for me, in order that I may have a good part of paradise."

"Man finds paradise in his own heart when he acts justly: the priests who promise heaven are knaves. I shall pray to God that He may inspire you to perform charitable deeds.—Adieu."

Loysik left the duke's tent expecting to be able to leave the village instantly. His hope was not verified. As he walked away he found himself in a narrow street that divided two rows of huts and was cut at right angles by a wide highroad. Loysik was walking thither in order to rejoin the young brother who guarded his mule, when suddenly the uproar of voices, that had before smitten his ears several times, broke out louder and nearer. Immediately thereupon, a crowd of the people who had followed Brunhild to the village in order to enjoy the sight of her death, broke forth like an eruption out of the highway, poured over the narrow street, and despite Loysik's efforts to disengage himself, carried him away like a straw by the torrent. The flood of people consisted of men, women and children; they were all in rags; they were slaves and were of the Gallic race. All cried at the top of their voices:

"Brunhild is coming out of the camp! She will pass this way!"

Loysik made no further efforts to contend against the crowd; he found himself pushed forward until further progress was barred at the sort of square in the center of which rose the tent of Clotaire II. A strong cordon of warriors drawn around the place, prevented the mob from entering it. As he stood there, in the very front ranks of the surging crowd Loysik witnessed the following spectacle:

Before him extended a rather wide avenue, now completely deserted of people; to his left the entrance to the royal tent; before the tent, Clotaire II, surrounded by the seigneurs of his

suite, among whom was the Bishop of Troyes. Two slaves on foot brought and kept before the King a spirited stallion, which they were hardly able to curb by means of two thongs attached to his bit; the animal reared violently although his hind legs were hobbled. With blood-shot eyes and dilated nostrils, the powerful beast made such frantic efforts to tear himself from the two slaves that his deep black coat streamed with sweat on his flanks and chest. The animal carried no saddle; his long mane floated to the breeze, or fell down over and almost completely covered his savage head. Despite all, the slaves succeeded in leading the stallion to Clotaire's tent. The King made a sign. Immediately, at the imminent risk of being trampled to pieces, the unhappy slaves crawled down upon their hands and knees, and slipped a rope with a running knot over each of the animal's hind legs; other slaves thereupon kept the horse in sufficient control to allow the removal of his hobbles. During this perilous process, the stallion became so furious that he reared and struck one of the slaves on the head with his front hoofs; the luckless fellow fell bleeding under the feet of the animal that then stooped, bit him ferociously, and crushed his bones with the trample of his hoofs. The corpse was removed, and two other slaves received orders to join those who, in order to control the stallion, clung with all their might to the thongs from his bit. Again cries were heard, first from a distance, but drawing nearer and nearer. The highroad, deserted but a moment before and running into the square in front of Loysik, was suddenly filled with a dense mass of foot soldiers, and presently a camel that towered by the full height of its body over the armed multitude, hove in sight of the aged monk. The troop of Frankish soldiers rent the air with their clamor:

"Brunhild! Brunhild! Triumph to Brunhild—Queen, look down upon your good people of Burgundy who are at your feet!"

Although in a dying state, although broken down by the tortures that she had undergone during the last three days, still

the old Queen, recalled from her stupor by the loudness of the yells that broke out all around her, found strength enough to raise herself for a last time upon the back of the camel, astride of whose back she had been placed and firmly bound. She was only a few steps from where Loysik stood. What the venerable monk then saw—Oh, what he saw is nameless, like the crimes of Brunhild herself. Her long, white, tangled, blood-clotted hair was the only—the only cover to the nakedness of the old Queen. The woman's legs; her thighs, her shoulders, her bosom, in short her every limb was no longer of human shape; it was but a heap of palpitating wounds and swollen, blackened, bleeding burns; two of her toe-nails, that had been pulled out, still hung dangling from reddening pellicules at her great toes; in the other toes of her feet and in her fingers, long iron needles were seen inserted between the nail and the flesh. Only her face been spared. Despite its cadaverous paleness; despite the traces of the unheard-of superhuman sufferings that it registered, left there by the tortures inflicted during the three consecutive days;—despite all, her face still bore the stamp of pride; a frightful smile curled the Queen's purplish lips; a flash of savage haughtiness illumined from time to time her breaking eyes. And, oh, fatality, those eyes alighted accidentally upon Loysik at the moment that Brunhild passed before him. At the sight of the monk, whose robe, long white beard and tall stature had attracted the dying Queen's eyes, her body seemed thrilled by a sudden emotion; she straightened in her seat; and gathering the little strength that still remained to her, she cried in a voice of despair, that sounded almost repentant:

“Monk, your speech was soothe—there is a justice in heaven! At this hour I am thinking, I am thinking—I am thinking of the death of Victoria.”

The furious hootings of the crowd drowned Brunhild's voice; her last effort, put forth in raising herself and speaking



to Loysik exhausted her failing strength. She fell over backward, and her inert body jolted up and down over the camel's crupper. Loysik had long struggled against the horror of the shocking spectacle. Hardly had Brunhild's voice ceased to be heard than he felt his head swim and his knees sink under him. But for two poor women, who, struck with compassion for his old age, supported him, the monk would have fallen to the ground and been trampled to death.

Loysik remained for a long time deprived of consciousness. When he recovered, night had come. He found himself lying in a hut upon a bed of straw. Beside him sat the young brother, who had succeeded in finding him. The two poor slave women had transported Loysik to their miserable hut. The first words pronounced by the monk, whose mind still labored under the effect of the horrible scene that he had witnessed, was the name of Brunhild.

"Good father," said one of the women, "the hated Queen was taken down from the camel; she was then only a corpse; she was fastened with ropes by the hands to the tail of a fiery horse, and the animal was then let loose; but that part of the execution did not last long; at the very first bound given by the horse it shattered Brunhild's head; her skull broke like the shell of a nut, and her brains were scattered in all directions."

Suddenly the young monk laborer said to Loysik, pointing in the direction of the glimmer that must have been produced by the reflection of a great but distant fire:

"Do you hear those distant yells? Do you see that light?"

"That light, my son, is the light cast by the pyre that Clo-taire II ordered raised," said one of the two old women; "those yells are the yells of the people dancing around the fire."

"What pyre?" asked Loysik with a shudder. "Of what pyre are you speaking?"

"After the wild horse broke the head of Brunhild, the people who came to the village in order to see her die besought the



King to have the accursed remains of the old she-wolf placed upon a pyre; the King gave his consent before his departure; he departed soon afterwards. The pyre was raised yonder at the square, and the light reaches us."

The evening breeze carried to Loysik's ears the cries of frantic joy, uttered by the crowd, wild with the intoxication of vengeance:

"Burn, burn, old bones of Brunhild, the accursed! Burn, burn, old accursed bones!"

As Loysik caught these words he cried:

"Oh, formidable contrast, formidable like the voice of history! The pyre of Brunhild—the pyre of Victoria!"

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## EPILOGUE

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Ronan, old little Odille, the Master of the Hounds and the Bishopess were promenading along the bank of the river Charolles, near the lodge where the monks of the monastery and the inhabitants of the Valley took their turns as sentinels near the landing-place of the punt. Since the revelation of the pretensions of the Bishop of Chalon, besides the regular sentinel, ten brothers and twenty colonists, all well armed, took turns in guarding the crossing, and encamped in an improvised block-house.

"Old Master of the Hounds," Ronan observed sadly, "this is the seventh day since Loysik left; he is not yet back; I can not overcome my uneasiness."

"Why, there he is!" cried Odille in great glee. "Do you not see his white mule? He is riding down the slope of the hill in great hurry; he is coming down to the river bank; send the punt across for him."

Ronan, the Master of the Hounds, Odille, the Bishopess, all their children, together with several monks and colonists threw themselves into the punt. The river was quickly crossed, the landing made, and all ran to meet the monk. Old Odille and the venerable Bishopess found again on that day their young limbs of girlhood. Loysik was given hardly time to alight from his mule. It was a pell-mell of arms, hands, heads around the respected old man. Whom was he to embrace first? He knew not whose caresses to respond to. After a while the tempest of tenderness subsided. Calm was restored. Joy no longer choked their throats. Conversation started on the way to the monastery, and Loysik narrated to his friends what he learned concerning the tortures of Queen Brunhild. He informed them of the confirmation of the charter of Clotaire I by Clotaire II.

"And lastly," Loysik proceeded to say, "upon my return from Ryonne, I called upon the Bishop of Chalon. The confirmation of the charter by Clotaire II was a good deal, but that was not all that was needed. There were still some formalities to fulfill."

"Brother Loysik," put in Ronan, "we heard from the Bishop of Chalon. It came about this way: After the departure of Brunhild's men-at-arms, whom we released upon receipt of the orders you sent us when you escaped death at the monster's hands, what should the archdeacon do but have the audacity to return at the head of about fifty of his tonsured fraternity, together with as many poor slaves of the bishopric. The slaves and the tonsured friars were armed at haphazard, and bore before their clerical troop a cross in lieu of a banner; they approached bravely to declare war to us, if we refused to obey the orders of the bishop, and to allow him to place our goods into his episcopal pockets."

"Ah! What a fine day we had of it!" said the Master of the Hounds. "The clerical troop brought along a boat upon their

wagons in order to cross the river. That day I was on guard with about thirty of our men. We saw the boat launched, and the archdeacon step in with two clerks for oarsmen. Three men gave us little concern. We allowed them to land. The archdeacon stepped ashore with casque and cuirass over his priestly robes, a long sword in his hand.

“‘If you will not submit to the orders of the Bishop of Chalon,’ the basilica captain cried out to us in a triumphant voice, ‘my troop will enter the Valley and reduce it to obedience by force of arms. I grant you a quarter of an hour to surrender yourselves.’”

“It does not take me quite so long to make up my mind what to do. So I answered him back on the spot: ‘We have already once set you free with your skin whole, notwithstanding your insolent language; this time, however, you will receive a rougher lesson, my basilica captain!’”

“Oh, old Vagre, old Vagre!” said Loysik shaking his head. “I disapprove of such violent language. Had I been here, you would not have spoiled your cause in that manner.”

“Good father,” answered the Master of the Hounds, smiling, as well as Ronan, “the only thing spoiled was the archdeacon’s hide. As soon said as done. Our good man was seized, his clerical robe raised, and the straps of our belts administered a thorough discipline to the basilica captain, all casqued and cuirassed as he was. After that he was deposited into our punt; my men and I stepped in, crossed the river and met the clerical army drawn up in line of battle on the opposite bank. Five or six of the tonsured gentry had armed themselves with bows and arrows. They shot a volley at us; the aim was taken badly enough; but accident willed it that they killed one of our men and wounded two. We were thirty at the most, but entered upon close quarters with the five score churchmen and poor slaves that they dragged after them. They tried to withstand us,

but we invoked our own special trinity—lance, sword and axe. It was not long before the redoubtable warriors of the Bishop of Chalon displayed to us the seams of the backs of their breeches in full view. The glorious episcopal captain leaped upon his mule and gave the signal to retreat by himself fleeing at full tilt; his tonsured brethren followed his example—we buried about a dozen dead, and picked up a few wounded ones, who were taken care of at the monastery and afterwards set at large. We have not since heard again from the brave episcopal army.”

“I knew all that, my friends, and I approve your action, except the discipline that you administered to the archdeacon, that I strongly condemn,” said Loysik; “I had much trouble in calming the anger of the Bishop of Chalon upon that particular head. For the rest, you deported yourselves as the occasion demanded. Aye, to defend one’s rights and repel force with force is but just; moreover, a resistance carried to the point of heroism is often politic. Brunhild recoiled before the idea of driving you to desperate means. Well, as I was saying to you, I called upon the bishop on my return from Clotaire’s camp. I found him furious by reason of your resistance, and the insult to the archdeacon. I told him that I condemned the insult, but that I approved the legitimate resistance of my brothers of the Valley. ‘What is the good of your resorting to violent means?’ I said to him. ‘You, a churchman, sent armed men against monks and colonists, who only ask to be allowed to live in quiet and by the sweat of their brow, as is their right. Your men were beaten back, and will be beaten back again if they return to the charge. I pray you to renounce all claims against the Valley; we, on our part, will recognize your right to spiritual jurisdiction, but nothing more.’ The bishop answered me furiously: ‘I shall then take away from you the priests that I send you to say mass at the monastery! I shall excommunicate the Valley!’ ‘If that be your pleasure, bishop, why, then we shall be excommunicated; for all that you will see the grass on our

meadows continue to grow green, our woods to set forth fresh branches, our fields to produce wheat, our vines to yield their juice as plentifully as ever, our cattle their milk, our bees their honey; children will continue to be born robust and ruddy as hitherto; your excommunication can in no manner change things. 'The only thing that could happen is that our neighbors will say: "Oh, behold an excommunicated Valley continuing to be fertile; excommunicated people remaining in a happy frame of mind and thriving; why, excommunication must be a farce!" So, then, bishop, the ultimate result would be that a punishment, that so many poor people imagine to be frightful, will be thought little or nothing of. Take my advice; give up all thought of violence and of coercion; respect our goods, our rights, our freedom, and we, in turn, will respect your spiritual jurisdiction—if not, not; the misfortunes that your iniquity may lead to will then fall upon your own head!' To make a long story short, my friends, after protracted debates, I obtained a new charter from the bishop. I shall read it to you. Listen carefully. It bears, perhaps, the germ of the enfranchisement of Gaul."

And Loysik read as follows:

"To the holy and venerable brother in Christ—Loysik, superior of the monastery of Charolles, built in the valley of that name, conceded to the said brother Loysik in perpetual donation, by virtue of a charter granted by the glorious King Clotaire I in the year 558, and confirmed by the illustrious Clotaire II this year of 613, I, Salvien, Bishop of Chalon. We believe it our duty to insert on this leaf what we and our successors must do with the aid of our Lord God:

"1st. The Bishop of Chalon, out of respect for the place, and without receiving therefor any price whatever, shall bless the altar of the monastery of Charolles, and, if requested shall grant the holy chrism every year.

"2nd. Whenever by the will of God a superior may have passed from the monastery to the bosom of God, the bishop shall,

without receiving any recompense therefor, raise to the rank of superior the monk who, by virtue of the worthiness of his life, may have been chosen by the community.

"3rd. Our successors, both bishops and archdeacons, or any other administrators, or any other dignitaries whatever of the city of Chalon, shall arrogate no other power over the monastery of Charolles, either in the ordination of persons, or the goods, or the farms of the Valley already given by the glorious King Clotaire I and confirmed by the illustrious King Clotaire II.

"4th. Our successors are forbidden to demand, or extort, under the title of presents, anything whatever from the monastery or from the parishioners of the Valley.

"5th. Our successors, unless they shall be requested by the superior of the community to come and pray at the monastery, shall never enter the said monastery, nor cross its outer precincts; and after the celebration of the holy mysteries, and after receiving short and simple thanks, the bishop shall forthwith return to his own residence without having to be requested to do so by anyone.

"6th. If any of our successors (which may God forbend) filled with perfidy, and driven by cupidity, should, in a temerarious spirit, attempt to violate the matters hereinabove set forth, then, smitten by divine vengeance, he shall be submitted to anathema.

"And in order that this constitution may ever remain in full force and vigor, we have willed that it be corroborated by our own signature.—SALVIEN.

"Done at Chalon, on the 8th day of the calends of November, of the year of the incarnation, 613."

"Good brother Loysik," said Ronan, "this charter guarantees our rights; thanks to you for having obtained it; but did we not have our swords to defend ourselves?"

"Oh, always that old leaven of Vagrery! The swords, always the swords! Thus the best of things turn to evil through abuse and hot-headedness! Yes, the sword, resistance, revolt



carried to the point of martyrdom whenever your rights are violated by force! But why shed blood, why fight when one's right is recognized and guaranteed? Moreover, who tells you that you would again prevail if again put to it? Who tells you that the Bishop of Chalon, or his successor, would not, in case you refused to recognize his spiritual jurisdiction, call some Burgundian seigneur to his aid? You would know how to die, but why die if one can live free and peaceful? This charter binds the bishop and his successors to respect the rights of the monks of the monastery and of the inhabitants of this valley. It is an additional guaranty. Should it ever be trampled under foot, then the hour will have sounded for heroic measures. Until then, my friends, spend your days in the tranquility that this charter insures to you."

"You are right, Loysik," replied Ronan, "that old leaven of Vagrery is ever fermenting in our heads. But is not this submission to the spiritual jurisdiction of the bishop, a submission that the charter consecrates, is it not a humiliation?"

"Did he not before now exercise more or less spiritual authority over us? Formally to recognize his spiritual authority is a matter of but slight importance; to deny it would be to expose ourselves to interminable troubles. And all to what purpose? Is not the inviolability of our goods and our property acknowledged?"

"That is so, brother."

"This charter, that, thanks to the firmness with which you resisted his iniquitous claims, instead of cowardly resigning yourselves to usurpations—this charter bears in itself the germ of the progressive enfranchisement of Gaul."

"How it that, Loysik?"

"Sooner or later, what we have done in the Valley of Charolles will be repeated in other provinces; the old Gallic blood will not forever remain torpid; some day, waking up at last to their own numbers and power, our sons will in their turn say

to the seigneurs and bishops: 'Recognize our rights and we will recognize the powers that you have arrogated to yourselves; if not, war—war to the bitter end—war to the death—war to the point of extermination!'

"And yet, Loysik," cried Ronan, "what a shame, what an iniquity to recognize that accursed power, born of a bloody and confiscatory conquest! To recognize the right of theft, of brigandage and of murder! The oppression of the Gallic race by the bishops and the race of Franks!"

"Brother, as much as yourself do I deplore these misfortunes. But what is to be done? Alas, the conquest and its accomplice the Church weigh down upon Gaul for over a century, and they have cast deep roots. Our descendants will be compelled to reckon with a power that years have fortified; they can not choose but recognize that power, while at the same time wresting from it, by force if necessary, a portion of the rights that our fathers were deprived of by the conquest. But what does it matter, my friends! The first step being taken others will certainly follow; and with each such step, marking its track with its own blood, our race will draw steadily nearer and nearer to ultimate deliverance. Aye, the brilliant day will finally dawn, the day that Victoria foretold, the brilliant day when Gaul, trampling under foot both the crown of the Frankish Kings and the tiara of the Popes of Rome, will re-arise proud, radiant and free. Have faith in the future!"

The news of Loysik's return flew from mouth to mouth, and spontaneously brought all the inhabitants of the Valley to the monastery. The day was celebrated with cordial joy. It gave new earnest of many years of quiet, prosperity and freedom to the monks of the monastery and to the colonists of the Valley of Charolles.

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I, Ronan, the son of Karadeucq, finished writing the above narrative two years after the death of Queen Brunhild, towards

the end of the calends of October of the year 615. Clotaire II continues to reign over Gaul as the sole ruler, as his great-grandfather Clovis and his grandfather Clotaire I before him. The murderer of Brunhild's grandchildren does not belie with his subsequent conduct the sinister character with which he started his reign. Nevertheless both the royal and the episcopal charter regarding the colony and the community of Charolles have been respected down to this date. My brother Loysik, my good old little Odille, the Bishopess and my friend the Master of the Hounds continue to defy age with their good health.

I hereby entrust my son's son with the mission of carrying this narrative to the descendants of Kervan, my father's brother, both of whom were the sons of Jocelyn. Brittany still remains the only province of Gaul that preserves its independence. It has repelled the Frankish troops of Clotaire II as it repelled the attacks of his ancestors.

My grandson will, I hope, arrive without encountering any mishap at the cradle of our family, situated near the sacred stones of Karnak. I hope he may successfully accomplish the pious pilgrimage, the same as I did more than fifty years ago.

I wish to enter upon this leaf a matter of importance to our family, divided as it now is in two branches, one inhabiting Burgundy, the other Brittany. In these days of civil wars and general disorder, the peace and freedom that we now enjoy may at any time be violently assailed. Our descendants will know how to die rather than relapse into slavery. But should it happen that unforeseen causes prevent a heroic resolution, if our family should again be brought under the yoke of servitude and its members carried away captive, it will be well, as a matter of precaution against unhappy days, alas! always possible, that the members of our family should carry some sign of recognition indelibly marked upon an arm with the point of a needle reddened in the fire and dipped in the juice of the privet berry. The smart is but slight, and the tender skin of a child

receives and forever keeps the indelible mark. The Gallic words *Brenn* and *Karnak*, words that recall the glorious past of our ancestors, are henceforth to be traced on the right arm of all the children that may succeed us, and so forward from generation to generation. Who knows but it may happen that members of our family, now divided into two branches, may, in the course of the ages cross one another's path? In that sign they will find the means of recognizing each other, and render each other mutual assistance.

And now, Oh, our children, leaving the branding needle that I have used upon my own grandchild as the symbol to accompany this narrative and be joined to Hena's gold sickle, Guilhern's little brass bell, Sylvest's iron collar, Genevieve's silver cross, Schanvoch's casque's lark and Loysik's poniard's hilt, I fervently hope that this narrative may, as all the preceding ones left by our ancestors, keep alive in your breasts the flame of an ardent love for your country and for your family. And may, Oh, my children! the moral conveyed by the adventures of my life, and of the lives of my father Karadeucq and my brother Loysik never be lost upon you. Gather from them instruction, example, hope and courage.

THE END.



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